THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A POSTDENOMINATIONAL MODEL OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT AT CHRISTIAN LIFE ASSEMBLY

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DEDICATION

To Clifton and Eunice Chitty,
my parents and best supporters

To L. M. Stephenson, my pastor
and father in the Lord

To my wife, Ramona,
and children, Jeremy, Joey, Mollie, and Rebekah—
you are the joy of my life!

To Terry, Royce, and Randall,
my brothers and still my heroes

To Brenda, Kay, and Vonna—
without you this would have never been finished

And
to the church family of Christian Life Assembly
in Columbia, South Carolina–you make ministry a joy!

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ABSTRACT

This document traces the origins, development and implementation of a postdenominational form of church government at Christian Life Assembly in Columbia, South Carolina. Elements include the description of the contextual settings which necessitated the change, along with cultural and denomination factors which contributed to the challenge associated with such transformation. Attention is given to processes implemented to generate structural, procedural, philosophical and missional change within the fabric of congregational life. Evaluation deals with measurable goals, subjective judgments, and set of future criteria to determine the ultimate success of the project.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

As the Assemblies of God enter what many are calling "Postdenominational America," a new governmental paradigm on the local church level is necessary in order to facilitate the effectiveness in current American culture.

It is my belief that congregations within the American Assemblies of God denomination are at a point of development in which the numerical size, cultural setting and stated ministry focus of the local congregation necessitate a break from or an adjustment to the prevailing form of local church government that is presently experienced by many congregations. The Assemblies of God began in 1914 as a *cooperative fellowship* of churches, which were loosely connected in order to solve logistical and procedural problems faced by many congregations involved in the Pentecostal Outpouring of the early twentieth century.

From humble beginnings the Assemblies of God has grown substantially, but many feel one of the price tags of growth has been an increasing loss of church autonomy and the weakening of effective pastoral leadership. This is manifested by:

1. A perception that legislation or policy that seems to impose external congregational control from either national or regional offices may become a hindrance within the local ministry.

2. A local congregational system of governance that is based more on the Taylor model of corporate board governance as developed in the late 1800s with the rise of Industrial Revolution in America.[1] The roots of congregational government are found by many as an effect of the American Revolution, which saw the idea of nondemocratic structures, whether political or ecclesiastical, fall into disfavor within the societal fabric of America.[2]

Whether such democratic, or *congregational*, forms of government are viewed as positive or negative is largely a matter of perspective and denominational background. It is my contention, however, that such restrictive and controlling structures have inadvertently hindered the spread of the Gospel by creating climates which:

1. Have hindered the ability of the local congregation to identify its purpose within the community and adapt new methods in a manner that will make success more likely within the context of its unique ministry.
2. Inadvertently fostered restrictive systems in some settings where ministers have occasionally been censured or possibly felt compelled to leave the movement because of methods, styles, or differences of opinion in nonessential doctrinal matters. A typical district constitution and by-law document states that local churches are under control of the district in matters not only of doctrine but also of "methods."[3] Although instances of this article being abused seem to be fairly

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[1]Ed Nelson, "The Hebraic Model of Church Government" (D.Min. diss., Bellwether Ministries, Anderson, South Carolina, 2000), 2–3.

[2] Christine Leigh Heyrman. *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 22–24, 87, 104, 105; 254–258.

[3] South Carolina District Bylaws, Article VI, Sections 6–13, 1984, 26–29.

rare, the possibility of such censure and control has often destroyed a pastor's sense of confidence in regard to risk-taking for the furtherance of God's kingdom.

3. Have created climates in which involvement with non-Assemblies of God ministries and personnel has been discouraged or forbidden, though this practice has largely disappeared in many segments of the denomination.
4. Have made it increasingly difficult for visionary pastors to lead their churches because of the encumbrance of "committee-driven" or "deacon-driven" forms of local church government stifling the flow of adaptability needed as churches mature and expand their ministries.

As one might expect, these issues are hotbeds of controversy within the Assemblies of God. In order to set the problem in its proper context, several facts should be established.

First of all, this is not an issue of "good versus bad" and perhaps not even of "right versus wrong." Disputes concerning our position in regard to social issues (homosexuality, abortion, etc.) are practically nonexistent in our movement. There is little debate concerning Statement of Fundamental Truths (our fundamental document concerning doctrine), which I support. These controversial issues revolve around the dynamic of leadership, control, and governmental styles embraced by the Assemblies of God and its member churches. My primary interest is in regard to the local church, though I feel some revision of policies and procedures on national and district levels may be advisable.

Secondly, I must frame this project with the clarification that neither my desire and my intent is not defection from the Assemblies of God, but rather reformation within my denomination, starting with my own local congregation. I am convinced that men of

integrity and godliness lead our denomination. My heart is full of admiration for these men, and my thoughts are not generated by rebellion or hostility. I have been affiliated with the Assemblies of God all my life, and have been credentialed thirty-five years on some level by the District or General Council. I believe we have chosen, at best, a cumbersome path of governance; and beginning with the local church, we can create a climate that is permission giving rather than restrictive, resulting in greater growth for our churches and for the greater kingdom of God. This model is not presented as a cure-all to church governmental dysfunction. Indeed, other valid models exist. This model is presented as a governmental form worth serious consideration among other models.

Thesis

It is my primary goal to describe and facilitate a postdenominational-era form of local church government in Christian Life Assembly in Columbia, South Carolina. A secondary goal is to work with the South Carolina District to help create an atmosphere in which this model of local church governance may be embraced and facilitated by other congregations who see the validity in this approach. The project is designed not to remove us from our denominational setting, but rather to enable us to serve within the Assemblies of God while at the same time avoiding unnecessary external control and removing the philosophy of lay-driven, congregational government.

Using Christian Life Assembly as a model and also working with the South Carolina District Committee for Reformation (district officers, presbyters, and committees), I hope to demonstrate:

1. A biblical model of church government and leadership styles that facilitate strong churches.

2. Effective, flexible local church government that encourages effective pastoral leadership and the releasing of lay ministry within the fellowship.
3. Supportive relationships with other churches, not only within our fellowship, but also across denominational lines.

The Setting: Christian Life Assembly

Christian Life Assembly in Columbia, South Carolina, has been the setting of my pastoral ministry since 1994. We presently serve a church family of about 1500 people. In September of 1994 there were approximately 460 people in attendance with 185 members. The senior pastor and an elected board of deacons, consisting at that time of ten men, led the congregation. The history of the church was steady, seeing a peak in attendance at one point of approximately 1000 in the late 1980s. Pastoral tenures were long, of thirty-one years and eighteen years. Periodically the church saw some defections which may be described as "splits." The governmental structure was essentially congregational. The church ministries committee, consisting primarily of laymen who were usually department or auxiliary ministry leaders, generated ministry policy.

My immediate predecessor resigned in May 1994, and as of September there was no replacement in sight. Internal politics involving a staff member who was desirous of the senior pastor position had created a situation in which the pastoral vacancy was not quickly filled. One effect of the delay in pastoral selection is seen in the financial posture of the church. Although stabilized, a nearly 60% decline in attendance in recent years had occurred. This was due in part to the pastor's serious illness opening the door for confusion within the body, including the lay leadership. An absence of a senior pastor

had exacerbated the vacuum in leadership during the transition. The board of deacons was asked to superintend a process that had only occurred once within the past forty-nine years. Because of the combination of the pastor's illness, a church split facilitated largely by a staff member, and the recent pastoral vacancy, the financial office went into survival-mode thinking. As a result, the personnel in the financial office, who were nonministerial, became the *de facto* leaders of the church.

I was elected to this church in October 1994. Even with a good relationship with the board of deacons, the church was largely crippled because of financial limitations as well as further defections by those who did not embrace the ministry of the new pastor. It seemed that in the absence of a pastor and probably for some time before, departments had become self-contained units within the church, and each functioned independently of the others. Several had their own checking accounts, boards, and policies. In many cases the church building, rather than the church family, was the common point binding what was known as Christian Life Assembly together. In essence the church had become a loose confederation of ministry efforts with little coordination between them. I began ministry in Columbia with a staff inherited from the previous pastor, and there was little coordination of efforts on the administrative level.

Perhaps the greatest attribute of the church was that the board of deacons consisted of men of excellent spirit who were true friends of the pastor. Almost all of the men continue to serve today as elders and are devoted to my ministry and leadership. This was significant because in some of my previous pastorates the deacons or lay leaders tended to be excessively controlling, and were in actuality one of the greatest obstacles to continued growth in those churches.

In 1995 the deacons and pastor agreed to a set of goals that would become the foundation for this project and its success:

1. The pastor would supervise all ministries within the church, and the church ministries council would be dissolved. All accounts would be brought into the church office and up-to-date accounting was required in the transition phase.
2. All departmental leaders were given one-year terms, renewable at the pastor's discretion.
3. The preaching of the Word would become the focal point of celebration. During the absence of a senior pastor the excellent music ministry had become a dominant focus of celebration. The midweek service was called "Praise Vacation" and was basically an evening of music. Average midweek attendance was nine in October of that year (not including the worship ministry personnel) and there was little interest in returning to a Bible study concept.
4. The pastor was given permission to reduce the influence and control of the financial office. Before this, pastoral requests were regularly denied, not because money was not available, but because there was no corresponding budget item. In fairness it should be said that the administrator was operating under an established policy, and the absence of a pastor had impacted the church considerably prior to my arrival. Also, the church treasurer (not a part of the financial office staff) always worked to correct this problem, but still this made day-to-day operations an intolerably complex procedure.
5. The pastor was given freedom to replace any and all staff members at his discretion.

6. Philosophical goals of the church shifted toward a more nontraditional approach to structure. The Sunday evening service was discarded in favor of small group meetings. Concisely stated, the church leadership decided to pursue "life" instead of tradition. This was a return to the philosophical roots provided years earlier by the former pastor, who had led the church with excellence during his tenure. In the days following that pastor's resignation, the church was hammered by financial stress, internal struggles with staff members, and a sense of restlessness within the church body. Even though I was elected with a 94% favorable vote, a considerable faction pulled out of Christian Life Assembly. Some chose to establish a new church led by a Christian Life Assembly staff member who was not allowed to candidate for the pastoral vacancy. The state of the church was described by one of the deacons: "The church was in a squat when you came, and for those first few months it looked like she was going sit down on you."
7. Possibly the most important decision was to adopt a positive, proactive approach to planning in regard to the church's future. This was done in the face of the same limitations we faced in 1994. In a practical sense it meant we would seek to fill all positions with an eye toward competency and excellence, and to abandon the unconscious, but real, notion that we would "hire down" to our salary levels. With an eye to the future the board of deacons made a conscious decision to raise the pastor's salary by approximately 20% to an acceptable level and to renovate the sanctuary by enlarging seating capacity by about 25%. It should be noted that this was done *before* any growth was seen and it signaled to the congregation that we would be on the offensive from that point on. It should be noted that even though

it was December 1995, before the pastoral raise was able to take effect, the momentum increased and we were able to pay cash for the sanctuary renovation (approximately $125,000).

Between the years 1996 and 2000, the church grew to an average of 715 in attendance. Programs were streamlined and the church leadership realized a major construction program was necessary. Between 2000 and 2005 the church systematically set out to transition from congregational government to a pastor-led model. That transition is the context of this project.

This project would embrace the following goals:

1. To determine a form of local church governance that would reflect our New Testament scriptural convictions.
2. To establish a philosophy of ministry that would operate within those parameters and would provide a context for measurable qualitative and quantitative growth.
3. To introduce and experiment with these suppositions within the local community of believers at Christian Life Assembly.
4. To accomplish this within the framework of fellowship in the South Carolina District of the Assemblies of God, creating a model that is reproducible and transferable to sister churches in our fellowship.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The Assemblies of God was born in the second decade of the Pentecostal Outpouring of the early twentieth century. Continuing the tradition of reformation in historic Christianity, our founding fathers connected this outpouring to the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28–32) and to the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–47). What the early leaders of the movement may have missed is that previous reformation had been largely theological and moral instead of structural. Certain church practices were opposed in reformation movements, but these were viewed as corrections to theology, not governance.

As immigration to America took place, the denominational system as we see it today began to take shape. In some ways the old denominational structures served the church well by giving structure and focus to efforts of evangelization. Using the principle of "old and new wineskins" as seen in Matthew 9:16–17, some church analysts today have expressed the idea that the days of effective denominationalism are gone and a new structure more relevant to the twenty-first century is replacing it. The danger here is that Jesus was speaking of a spiritual dynamic larger than local church government. Church leaders must be careful not to package prejudices and preferences into the words of Jesus. It should be noted, however that the context of the statement was the resistance by the Pharisees of the new paradigm of God as seen in Christ. On one occasion, when asked why His disciples did not walk according to the tradition of the elders, Jesus criticized the

Pharisees for replacing God's law with man-made tradition.[1] If it is a legitimate argument that at least some denominational structures have replaced the life-giving dynamic of the church, we understand why denominationalism has become a potential hazard. If this is true, what should replace the present structure? In other words, what is the "new wine" in our cultural setting?

Readings associated with this project have indicated that the term postdenominationalism is not a widely acceptable moniker except within those congregations who place only marginal value on the historical denominational systems. Indeed, the word has problems, but I have chosen to retain the term postdenominational in describing our new model at Christian Life Assembly for the following reasons:

1. The new Christian Life Assembly model is not based on our particular denominational governance, programs, or methods.
2. It is accepted in many church growth circles that the effective functioning of denominational systems is seen as largely ineffective in today's culture.

For instance, David Barrett identifies a worldwide move toward postdenominationalism as "the latest in a long line of major historical realignments within global Christianity."[2] Sociologist David Martin writes,

> Over the past thirty or so years the religious map of the world has changed dramatically. In the developed west the liberal religious establishment has seen their religious establishment shrink relative to the conservative evangelicals. In the third world, the World Council of Churches share of the Protestant constituency has dropped, and a protean indigenous Christianity has emerged indifferent to the Western theological intelligentsia. More often than not, this shift is toward a Pentecostal faith in the gifts of the Holy Spirit—healing, tongues,

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[1] Peter C. Wagner, *Changing Church* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2003), 31.

[2] David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Trends, A.D. 30–A.D. 2200* (Pasadena, California; William Carey Library, 2001), 293.

exorcism, prophecy, holiness. Overall, perhaps a quarter of a billion people are involved.[3]

The decline, however, is not simply in those seen as in liberal groups, but also in many settings that have historically been highly conservative. The American Assemblies of God, for instance, experienced a 65% increase in membership during the 1970s, but saw momentum fade to a 29% growth in the 1980s. The 1990s showed single digit growth, and if the ethnic church increases are deducted from the Anglo congregations, the first decade of the new century may indicate an actual decline in membership for the first time since the founding of the Assemblies of God in 1914.[4] Church Growth professor Peter Wagner cites The Episcopal Church, the United Methodists, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the United Church of Christ as losing significant numbers between the 1960s and present day. Combined, the membership of these groups declined by a total of over 3,500,000 in just over thirty years. A 1974 Gallup survey showed that 51% of Americans belonged to traditional denominations, but the number had reduced to 35% by the mid 1990s.[5]

3. Another reason for the use of the term postdenominational is that the new reformation is seen as dealing with structural and contextual issues rather than theological issues.

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[3] David Martin, "Wesley's World Revolution," *National Review,* 31 December 1995, 26.

[4] David Cartledge, *The Apostolic Revolution: The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets in the Assemblies of God in Australia* (Chester Hill, Australia: Paraclete Institute, 2000), 51, referring to *Report of Spiritual Life Committee*, by Robert Schmidgall (chairman), 1993 General Council of the Assemblies of God, Minneapolis, MN, 3.

[5] Peter C. Wagner, *Churchquake!* (Ventura: Regal Book, 1999), 12, commenting on numbers made available in statistics on the Assemblies of God U.S.A. 1997. Also see, *The General Secretary's Report,* by George Wood, 1993–1995 Assemblies of God Biennial Report, Springfield, MO: The General Council of the Assemblies of God, 1995, 8.

The implication of this is that the ineffectiveness of most denominational structures is not seen as the result not of neglect or perversion of doctrine, but rather on the insistence of some denominations to hold to heritage instead of seeking methodological innovation that would ensure relevance in current cultural settings. At Christian Life Assembly, we have not deviated from our doctrinal essentials at all, but the way we "do church" has been overhauled.

Donald Miller's study of this phenomenon caused him to decry rigid denominationalism:

> If Christianity is going to survive, it must continually reinvent itself, adapting its message to the members of each generation, along with their culture and geographical setting.[6]

Denominational leaders are slow to concede this point and some leaders have taken an opposing view altogether. Presbyterian Richard Hudnut wrote,

> It is a tough time for the American church. In many quarters membership is down. Attendance is down. But church growth is not the point. The point is whether the church is being true to the gospel. And, in city after city and town after town, it is. Indeed, *because* it is being faithful it is often *losing* members. The 'deadwood' is gone. The 'faithful remnant' remains. The church is lean and stripped for action in the '70s. . . . People are leaving the Church. It could not be a better sign.[7]

In my opinion, this view places Hudnut squarely in camp with those who, like the American Amish, have chosen to preserve heritage at the expense of the Great Commission. By this statement I do not mean to imply that the Amish are to be criticized for holding to their heritage as foundational to their faith; but by doing so they are severely limiting their audience and the resultant opportunities for conversions. My point

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[6] Donald Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism* (Berkeley California: University of Berkeley Press, 1997), 18.

[7] Richard Hudnut, *Church Growth is Not the Point* (New York: Harper Collins, 1975), ix–xi.

is that such reasoning as Hudnut's touches only partial truth, and does so to the neglect of the bigger picture—that the denominational church is, indeed, losing ground.

Church Life specialist Lyle Schaller sheds clarifying light on this dilemma: "I am not proposing that the substance of the gospel be changed, (but) I am proposing that we need to radically change the way we package and proclaim the substance of the gospel."[8] Basically, both Schaller and Miller argue that the failure of the denominations is the seedbed for a new reformation, not against apostasy, but against cultural irrelevance. Schaller confesses, "I was focusing on the renewal of the old, and failed to see that a new reformation in American Christianity was well underway."[9] Miller agrees: "I believe we are witnessing a second reformation that is transforming the way Christianity will be experienced in the twenty-first century."[10]

4. I am further convinced that postdenominational is the correct descriptive term because early evidence suggests that the cost of wholesale denominational reform is staggering.

Peter Wagner states that he has seen only one successful example of wholesale renewal of a denominational structure—The Australian Assemblies of God. This change involved the appropriation of what Wagner calls "A New Apostolic Model," which will be discussed in detail in subsequent pages.[11] Margaret Paloma, an Assemblies of God historian, writes in *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads*:

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[8] Lyle Schaller, *The New Reformation: Tomorrow Arrived Yesterday!* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 14.

[9] Ibid., 13.

[10] Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism,* 11.

[11] Peter C. Wagner, *Churchquake!* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1999), 11.

> "Just as other once-charismatic religious institutions have been led down the path of over-institutionalization and over-regulation, which in turn has destroyed much of the original charisma, the Assemblies of God too faces threats from routinization. . . . The very success of the Assemblies and the inevitable development of bureaucratic organization has produced certain tensions."[12]

Peter Wagner believes the Assemblies of God has historically resisted movements within its ranks which appeared to stray into new territory, such as the Latter Rain Movement of the 1940s and the Charismatic Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.[13] Even recent revivals such as the Toronto Renewal and the Brownsville Revival met with opposition from within the Assemblies of God leadership, though leaders as significant as the current General Superintendent, in particular, accepted Brownsville.[14]

In reference to the possibility of renewing existing structures, Ralph Neighbour, in his book *Where Do We Go From Here?,* writes using the analogy of new wine and old wineskins:

> Attempts at renewal don't work for one reason, our Lord told us 2,000 years ago that it could not be done. Every time we try to ignore His clear teaching, we fail. In retrospect, I could have saved myself twenty-four years of dreaming an impossible dream if I had taken His admonition literally. While I was trying to *renew*, He was shaping something *brand new.*[15]

Perhaps the most difficult denominational assignment is to successfully reverence the past without reversing the future.

The 1990s were designated as "The Decade of Harvest" in the Assemblies of God. This was an exciting, passionate endeavor that ultimately failed; at least in the sense

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[12] Margaret M. Paloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 94.

[13] Wagner, *Churchquake!,* 149–152.

[14] Goodall, Wayne I. and Thomas Trask, "Brownsville Revival" *Enrichment Journal* (Springfield MO, Spring 1998), 13–15.

[15] Ralph Neighbour, *Where Do We Go From Here?* (Houston, TX: Touch Publications, 1990), 92.

that many goals were not reached. At our General Council of 1995 we were urged to seek God for successful reimplantation of the Decade of Harvest strategies. One report chose the following wording:

> The Harvest Task Force, in its first meeting under the new leadership structure, issued a clarion call to 're-tool' and 're-focus' for the harvest. Specific directives include (1) a spiritual call to revival. . . . While number goals can serve as a measure of progress, the emphasis needs to return to the basics.[16]

Great fervency and humility was associated with that report along with a pause in the business session to pursue the Lord in repentant prayer. Men of excellent character, ability, and virtue led the Decade of Harvest, but the program was stalled. As a movement we still felt the sting of failure that had attached itself to us in the debacle associated with the moral failures of Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker, men touted as heroes within the Assemblies of God. In retrospect, in dealing with the cause of our stalled project the Assemblies of God gave the right answers, but had asked the wrong questions. Our decline did not seem to be a matter of declining passion alone, but perhaps one of cultural irrelevance as well. There was no new direction, only an appeal to return to the past. It seems a look in both directions was warranted.

The term postdenominational does not, however, accurately reflect that a great number of these "new reformation churches" are themselves within denominational structures. Some megachurch pastors and leaders, such as Jack Hayford (in the Foursquare denomination) and George O. Wood (General Secretary of the Assemblies of God), have resisted the use of this term, feeling that it is pejorative to denominational

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[16] Assemblies of God, *General Council Biennial Report 1993–1995,* (Springfield, MO: J.R. Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center) digital documents, 12.

leaders and programs.[17] After consideration, many proponents of this view have chosen to identify this move by other names, including "Restoration Churches," "Grass-Roots" Churches, "Neo-denominational Churches," "New Paradigm Churches," and even "The Next Church."[18]

Therefore, the theological framework of this project is dictated by the following four contextual factors:

1. What is the theological/biblical role of denominations, particularly in regard to local church governance?
2. What scriptural model, if any, blends sound ecclesiastical authority with cultural identification?
3. What governing systems seem to be culturally relevant?
4. While embracing the postdenominational concept, how can we transition to a new model without terminally rupturing our relationship with our fraternal organization?

It became the conviction of the leadership of Christian Life Assembly that the New Testament provided no insight into the existence or nature of what we identify as a modern denominational structure. In fact, the present structures we see modeled appear contradictory to the words and wishes of Jesus recorded in John 17:11, 18–22, that His followers may "be one, as the Father and I are one." Our sense of the earliest churches is that they were loosely connected; the common thread being the doctrine and fatherly influence of the apostles. This same care and oversight was modeled by Paul, and such oversight is evidenced by his instruction to the Ephesian elders, to Timothy and Titus as

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[17] Wagner, *Churchquake!,* 38–39.

[18] Ibid., 135–136.

they led the congregations in Ephesus and Crete, respectively.[19] This simplicity, however, is hindered by American laws which require nonprofit organizations to operate under minimum guidelines and bylaws designed to protect the interests of the citizens in each state. One suggestion was to abandon our 501-(C)-3 nonprofit status altogether, a solution that created many more problems than it solved. Since our goal was to be biblically founded *and* culturally relevant, we committed early in our process to satisfying the requirements for incorporation as a non-profit religious body in the state of South Carolina. While such concessions would be viewed with disfavor in some cultures (such as the Chinese House Church Movement), this expectation itself was part of cultural relevance in the United States. This seemed true especially after the Enron-type scandals and the lack of public confidence expressed in churches following the televangelist abuses of the 1980s.

A leadership team consisting of Christian Life Assembly pastors spent eighteen months investigating the current models of denominational structure, seeking to find a harmonious blend with scriptural terms such as elders *(presbuteros),* overseers *(episkopas),* shepherds, pastors and rulers *(poimen),* and deacons *(diakonos)*. It is beyond the scope of this project to present exhaustive studies dealing with the epistemology and conclusions of the New Testament text, but out of our search the committee unanimously agreed that:

A. While such terms are clearly used in scripture, there is enough textual ambiguity that we cannot conclusively recommend any particular governmental structure as the one all-sufficient model. The scripture clearly identifies Christ as the Head of His Church, and we are given clear instruction regarding behavior and conduct toward each other and the world. Our belief, however, is that a crystal clear

[19] Acts 20:17–38 NIV; 1 Timothy 3:1–16; 4:1–6:20 NIV; Titus 1:5–3:15 NIV.

picture of church government is not seen in the New Testament for one or two possible reasons:

1. It may be that God understood the wisdom of church government specifics to arise within the context of local cultures. In this scenario only the loosest application of offices would be employed, and only for the purpose of preserving the integrity of the clear teachings of scripture. In this setting congregationalism may be the most effective form in a given setting, while representative elders may serve better in another, and a form of apostolic rule in still another setting.
2. It is possible that the church's governance is based on a Hebraic model that would have been thoroughly understood by the first generation of Christians, who were largely of Hebraic descent, and logically superimposed over the Gentile congregations as well as they developed. This view is espoused and taught by Dr. Ed Nelson, a pioneering missionary and leader within the Assemblies of God.[20]
3. It may be that both are true to some extent. The liberty afforded Christian congregations by the first view, as well as the time-tested principles of the Hebraic model, seemed to "fit" what we sensed was surfacing in our corporate journey.

B. In regard to policy formulation, the leadership team of Christian Life Assembly already had experience in making subjective decisions that had their roots in the best Biblical exegesis we could find. An example is the long process of establishing a church understanding of divorce and remarriage and how our position would impact leadership requirements as well as the understanding of what constituted a church-blessed union. We would not be unwilling to say that the scripture may not be as clear as we would like on certain subjects. This is, of course, no "fault" of God or His Word. It may simply be that we lack perspective, or we are still simply seeing "through a glass darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12). The minimal acceptable standard is to never consciously violate God's Word, and to never unnecessarily assume liberties that would hurt the local Body of Christ and its mission.
C. We would fully accept the Biblical terms, titles, and offices. If there was insufficient textual evidence for proper implementation in some instances, we would slowly and deliberately piece together a model that was true to scriptural principles, yet unafraid to violate tradition.[21]

With these points of agreement settled upon, the leadership team considered the question of which governing system would be relevant to twenty-first century South Carolina. We dismissed the American congregational system as unproductive and

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[20] Ed Nelson, "The Hebraic Model of Church Government," 2–3.

[21] Christian Life Assembly Board Meeting, official minutes of meeting on 29 April 2002 and confirmed at annual leaders retreat in 15 November 2002, Columbia, SC.

restricting at best, unscriptural at worst. We gravitated toward the idea of strong pastoral leadership, feeling that such an idea was a common assumption in scripture.

The following scriptural concepts created the parameters for church responsibility and authority:

Elders were commonly thought of as rulers in Israel, and the idea seemed to translate into the young Hebraic church and into the Gentile congregations as well.

> Acts14:23 NIV: Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.
>
> Acts 15:2–6 NIV: Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." [2]This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. [3]The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. [4]When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. [5]Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.' [6]The apostles and elders met to consider this question.
>
> Acts 15:22 NIV: [22]Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers.
>
> Acts 16:4 NIV: As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey.
>
> Acts 20:17 NIV: From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church.
>
> Acts 20:28–30 NIV: [28]Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. [29]I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. [30]Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.
> 1 Timothy 4:14 NIV: Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

> 1 Timothy 5:17–20 N1V: [17]The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. [18] For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages." [19]Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. [20]Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning.
>
> Titus 1:5–9 NIV: [5]The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. [6]An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. [7]Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless-- not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. [8]Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. [9]He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.
>
> James 5:14 NIV: Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.
>
> 1 Peter 5:1 NIV: To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed

The observation that overseer, shepherd or ruler, and elder were used referring to the same people in Acts 20:28-30 led us to believe that these titles essentially represented function of the office which, in essence, defined the leadership of the church.

Consideration of the five-fold ministry list in Ephesians 4:11–13 made the leadership team comfortable with the concept that responsibility for the church essentially rested on a group of leaders. Realizing that committee rule had proven highly ineffective for us, we also realized in the narrative of Acts 15 that James was clearly the one who settled the dispute regarding Gentile believers. The problem was presented to apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church. The appeals were made, the discussion ensued, but it was James who called the meeting to the point of decisive action and resolved the confusion with the following words:

> It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.[22]

In our meetings we were becoming convinced that the church is governed by a group of God-called leaders, with a visionary senior pastor following the example of James and being the "first among equals."

Theologically we accepted Ed Nelson's premise (explained in the body of the Literature Review) that the principles of New Testament Church government can be understood only within the context of the Hebraic Model, which supported our conclusions concerning eldership. This doesn't imply that *methods* of administration are nonnegotiable, but only that responsibility (Hebrews 13:17) of oversight belongs to the elders, and as importantly, to one chief elder who serves as the leader within the context of a ministry team. As an example of our reasoning, the crisis concerning the Grecian widows in the Jerusalem church was resolved by elder apostolic/elder oversight and commissioning, but the specifics of how this was done was apparently left to the wisdom of the seven men chosen to superintend the task.[23]

Finally there was the question of how our goal could be achieved without severing ties with our denominational system, possibly causing dishonor to the body of Christ and to the Assemblies of God as well. Remembering the words of Ralph

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[22] Acts 15:19–21 NIV.

[23] Acts 6:1–7 NIV.

Neighbour cited earlier,[24] we realized that a clear path must be walked in order to avoid unnecessary offense.

1. Legal questions had to be addressed, since current congregational structure requires Assemblies of God congregations to walk in three sets of bylaws which are espoused by the General Council, the District Council, and the local church.
2. Theological issues had to be researched in order to remain biblically structured, especially since Assemblies of God structure frowns heavily upon "dictatorial rule" by a pastor. The "chief elder" concept could be very easily misunderstood at its first presentation.
3. Core values had to be established in case opposition forced us to make a decision between denominational affiliation and what we believed to be the leading of God for our church.
4. Finally, public relations was a significant concern, because one of the current battles being waged within the Assemblies of God is over issues of governance. The conflict has produced a book sponsored by The Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, *He Gave Apostles: Apostolic Ministry in the 21st Century,*[25] as well as an official position paper developed by denominational leaders, published in 2003 in the collection: *Where We Stand: The Official Position Papers of the Assemblies of God.*[26]

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[24] "Attempts at renewal don't work for one reason, our Lord told us 2,000 years ago that it could not be done." Ralph Neighbour, *Where Do We Go From Here?* (Houston, Texas; Touch Publications, 1990), 92.

[25] Edgar Lee, ed., *He Gave Apostles: Apostolic Ministry in the 21st Century* (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2005), 5–9.

[26] Assemblies of God, *Where We Stand* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2003).

Unless we presented the specifics of our plan thoroughly to our district leadership, we would run the risk of alienating officials who were opposed to the apostolic models being pursued by some churches. While we are not opposed to the apostolic concept at all, we feel that our model is more successful in addressing some of the concerns expressed by Assemblies of God leaders over what has been called a "dictatorial system" of control. In short, we embrace the principles held by many apostolic churches, but have taken care to choose more subtle verbiage in describing our structure. I am still referred to as "pastor," and have steered clear of unnecessary confrontation. This has not been a problem-free approach, however. David Cartledge lovingly offered his correction to me in regard to this, stating that our cautious posture did not take us far enough into the flow of what he perceived as the next great move of God.

> We have problems with pastors and evangelists in the Assemblies of God, but we haven't stopped using those titles. The American AG is copping-out on this. If you believe in Apostles, use the title.[27]

We do agree with the basic foundational apostolic structure described in Cartledge's book *The Apostolic Reformation*, which served as the philosophical model for our local church change. In this groundbreaking work David Cartledge describes the transition from a modified congregational government form to an apostolic model of responsibility.[28] Cartledge's work traces the history of the Australian Assemblies of God from their inception in 1937. In 1977 the new Apostolic Model was adapted, and the book is a story of amazing growth since that time.

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[27] David Cartledge, *The Apostolic Revolution*, 236–242.

[28] Ibid., 247.

Renewal movements are commonplace in denominational structures. Most pastors and church leaders have a sense of loyalty to their roots and pray for successful revival transformations when necessary. Cartledge and the ministers in Australia moved a step further. This openness to change, however, is the exception, not the norm.

> The denominational leaders have tolerated [these movements], but the problems of control, power and particularly management of financial resources have caused them to domesticate the renewal movements. . . . What renewal might have taken place is largely cosmetic. Other denominations have restructured organizationally to be relieved of cumbersome bureaucracies and agencies that have multiplied through the years. However, when all the study commissions have reported, when the consultants have been paid, when the emotionally charged conventions and assemblies have ended and when the new structure is announced, little has usually changed. The old wineskin may look a bit different, but it is still the old wineskin.[29]

The challenge for Christian Life Assembly was that the climate for change in the American Assemblies of God is of a totally different concern than in Australia. American Assemblies of God interests seemed to be more in line with rekindling the fires of the past and returning to our heritage. The mood in Australia was for a new wineskin, a sense that:

> . . . unless we changed, totally and soon, we would cease to be a vessel of significance in the hands of God. We found the thought of 'just more of the same' to be unfathomable. Like John Knox in his lament for Scotland, we said 'O, God, give us Australia, or we die!' [30]

The American Assemblies of God expressed formal opposition to the establishment of apostolic governance in the official position paper entitled *Apostles and Prophets*.

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[29] Charles Trueheart, "The Next Church," *Atlantic Monthly,* August 1996, 35–37.

[30] David Cartledge, interview by author, written 15 January 2005, Columbia, SC.

The rapid advance of the Pentecostal revival has also been accompanied by a new openness to the gifts of the Spirit. The evangelical world increasingly has turned from cessationism, the belief gifts of the Spirit ceased at the end of the New Testament era, to an understanding that New Testament gifts of the Holy Spirit are vital for ministry today.

With the restoration of the miraculous gifts to the Church has also come the question of whether God is restoring the five-fold ministry of Ephesians 4:11: It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers. Bible scholars differ on whether the gifts of pastor and teacher are separate in Ephesians 4 (yielding a total of five), or whether a better translation might be . . . and some to be pastor-teachers (yielding a total of four). Greek grammar would seem to dictate four, but the New Testament often discusses pastoral and teaching roles separately. However, the best designation for ministry is neither fivefold nor fourfold but manifold. Ephesians 4:12 gives to all saints the work of ministry, while 1 Corinthians 12:28,30 and Romans 12:6, 8 provide aspects of ministry beyond the designations in Ephesians 4:11, 12.

Relatively few questions are raised about the validity of contemporary evangelists, pastors, and teachers. However, there are a number of voices in the church today calling for the restoration of apostles and prophets, thinking these offices are the key to continued growth and vitality. The issue is important, and this paper is an effort to seek scriptural guidance.

The purpose of this paper has been to study the roles of apostles and prophets within the Ephesians 4:11, 12 ministry context and present findings both consistent with Scripture and relevant for this strategic time in the growth of the Pentecostal movement. The intent is not to be argumentative or polemical but to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3). With these considerations in mind, the following conclusions are offered:

1. The apostolic nature of the church is to be found in adherence to the Word of God, which has been faithfully transmitted by the apostles of Jesus Christ in their foundational role, and in vital participation in the life and ministry of the Holy Spirit, who baptized, gifted, and led the first apostles.

2. Since the New Testament does not provide guidance for the appointment of future apostles, such contemporary offices are not essential to the health and growth of the church, nor its apostolic nature.

3. While we do not understand it to be necessary, some church bodies may in good faith and careful biblical definition choose to name certain leaders apostles. The word apostle (apostolos) is used in different ways in the New Testament: (1) for the Twelve disciples originally appointed by Jesus (and later Matthias); (2) for

the Twelve plus Paul and a larger group (1 Corinthians 15:3, 8) whose exact numbers are somewhat uncertain; and (3) for others such as Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25) and the unnamed brothers Paul wrote about (2 Corinthians 8:23). Groups one and two, personally called and commissioned by the risen Lord, are often referred to in Scripture as apostles of Jesus Christ and are foundational apostles (Ephesians 2:20) with unique revelatory and authoritative roles in establishing the church and producing the New Testament. In the third group, the apostles of the churches were assigned specific roles and responsibilities as needed by the early churches.

Contemporary apostles, of course, will not have seen or been commissioned by the risen Lord in the manner of the apostles of Jesus Christ, nor will they be adding their teachings to the canon of Scripture. Presumably they will demonstrate the other marks of an apostle taught in the New Testament.

4. The title of apostle should not be lightly granted or assumed. Historically, apostles have been persons of recognized spiritual stature, stalwart character, and great effectiveness in the work of the church. Paul's warnings about those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about, his assertion that such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ, and his further association of them with Satan [who] himself masquerades as an angel of light, (2 Corinthians 11:12,14) are sobering reminders that unfettered human pride in seeking church leadership can blind one to the machinations of the devil. Persons lacking character may attach the title of apostle to themselves in order to assert dominance and control over other believers, while leaving themselves unaccountable to the members in their care or the spiritual eldership of their own fellowship.

5. The function of apostle occurs whenever the church of Jesus Christ is being established among the unevangelized. As Pentecostals, we fervently desire a generation of men and women who will function apostolically: to take the gospel with signs following to people at home and abroad who have not yet heard or understood that 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16).

6. Prophecy is an ongoing gift of the Holy Spirit that will always be broadly distributed throughout a holy and responsive church until Jesus comes. The Spirit sovereignly chooses and directs persons who are open and sensitive to His gifts and promptings and endows them variously with an array of verbal gifts. Paul admonished, Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1). Many persons of both sexes may be expected to exercise the gift of prophecy in various ways, as seen in the New Testament.

The New Testament does not make provisions for establishing the prophet in a hierarchical governing structure of the church; in fact, the content of prophecy

itself should always be tested by and responsible to the superior authority of Scripture. However, the church should long for authentic prophecy with a message, which is relevant to contemporary needs and subject to the authority of Scripture.

Finally, the Ephesians 4:11, 12 gifts are both the historical and contemporary heritage of the Church. Some apostolic and prophetic functions flowing from persons directly commissioned by the risen Lord and acting in revelatory capacities seem clearly to belong to the foundational era of the Church. At the same time, some of those functions having to do with the revitalization, expansion, and nurture of the church ought to be present in every generation. We encourage all believers, led and filled by the Spirit, to allow themselves to be fully utilized as servants of the Lord, since all gifts are needed to edify and complete the body as well as to mobilize the body to reach the world. Then the purpose of all ministry gifts will be realized: To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:12, 13).

Practical Questions Regarding Apostles And Prophets

1. Does the Assemblies of God recognize present-day apostles and prophets?

The Assemblies of God recognizes ministers as certified, licensed, or ordained. Presbyters and superintendents oversee the work of District Councils and the General Council. Local churches appoint deacons. The Assemblies of God believes this practice is consistent with apostolic practice provided in the pastoral letters of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. The pastoral letters do not make provision for the appointment of apostles or prophets, nor does the Book of Acts indicate that provision for such was given in the churches established on the missionary journeys. The apostles appointed not apostles or prophets but elders (Acts 14:23). At the conclusion of the missionary journeys, Paul met with the elders of the Ephesian church (Acts 20:17, 38). Clearly, elders are also given the functions of bishop (overseer) and shepherd (pastor) (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2).

Thus, within the Assemblies of God, persons are not recognized by the title of apostle or prophet. However, many within the church exercise the ministry function of apostles and prophets (emphasis mine). Apostolic functions usually occur within the context of breaking new ground in unevangelized areas or among unreached people. The planting of over 225,000 churches worldwide since 1914 in the Assemblies of God could not have been accomplished unless apostolic functions had been present. In the Early Church, false apostles did not pioneer ministries; they preyed on ministries established by others. Prophetic functions occur when believers speak under the anointing of the Spirit to strengthen, encourage, or comfort (1 Corinthians 14:3). All prophecies are to be weighed carefully (1 Corinthians 14:29). A predictive prophecy may be true, but the

prophet whose doctrine departs from biblical truth is false. A predictive prophecy that proves false leads to the conclusion that the person is a false prophet (Deuteronomy 18:19–22).

Finally, it must be noted that titles are not as important as ministry itself. Too often a title is worn in an attitude of carnal pride. The title does not make the person or the ministry. The person with ministry makes the title meaningful. Jesus explicitly warned His disciples against engaging in the quest for titles (Matthew 23:8, 12). He tells us, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave, just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25, 28).

2. What is the implication for the local church in the current emphasis on apostles and prophets?

The Pentecostal and charismatic movements have witnessed various excessive or misplaced theological emphases over the years. We look with grave concern on those who do not believe in congregational church government, who do not trust the maturity of local church bodies to govern themselves under Scripture and the Spirit (emphasis mine). Such leaders prefer more authoritarian structures where their own word or decrees are unchallenged.

In the current emphasis on Ephesians 4:11, verse 12 is being neglected: . . . to prepare God's people for works of service [i.e. ministry], so that the body of Christ may be built up. The stress of the New Testament lies with every-believer ministry. The Protestant Reformation recaptured the biblical truth of the priesthood of all believers. The Pentecostal movement has spread like a fast-moving fire through the world because of the Spirit-gifted ministry of the entire body. The church must always remember that leadership gifts are not given for the exaltation of a few but for the equipping of all God's people for ministry.[31]

The two underlined sentences reveal the heart of the break between the Australian Assemblies of God and its American fraternity. American scholars allow for the function of an apostle, but in the context of missionary work only.

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[31] Assemblies of God, "Apostles and Prophets," positional statement, approved as the official statement by the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God on 6 August 2001, available from http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/pp_4195_apostles_prophets.cfm; internet; last accessed 21 February 2006.

The problems the Christian Life Assembly leadership team identified were as follows:

1. The concerns of the official position paper deal well with excesses and aberrant views expressed by some in the apostolic movement, but totally misrepresent the heart of the Australian structure and other models which are considered "apostolic" as well.
2. Most of the apostolic models, even in Australia, are not concerned with "office" or title as much as they are interested in function, which is exactly what the position paper acknowledges as genuine.
3. Because there is little meaningful dialog, unfortunate divisions have been made that allow for little creativity and discourage the formation of new models.
4. The Australian model, while denounced, is presently the only fraternal Assemblies of God fellowship in the western world that is growing, according to Cartledge.[32]
5. With respect, the governance of the Assemblies of God goes to great lengths to discourage what has been cited as the specific goal of local congregationalism. The phrase cited above appears to be ignored when the local church body falls into disagreement with denominational views:

> We look with grave concern on those who do not believe in congregational church government, who do not trust the maturity of local church bodies to govern themselves under Scripture and the Spirit.[33]

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[32] Cartledge, 247.

[33] Assemblies of God, "Apostles and Prophets," positional statement, 6 August 2001.

> We agree with the statement of the position paper, but to those embracing some form of apostolic model, this seems to say, *You don't need any external authority . . . except the General Council.*

I have spent so much time on this point simply to show that this is more than a doctrinal rift between Aussies and Americans. This bears shades of meaning for how the local church conducts its business and plans its future. The core issue for Christian Life Assembly was whether we would fulfill our vision by the old system or something new, perhaps untried, in our setting.

Peter Wagner teaches that the new model should be identified as the "New Apostolic Reformation." Wagner writes:

> In the United States, the most verbal and concerted attack against the idea of there being legitimate apostles and prophets in the Church today has come from the Assemblies of God, headquartered in Springfield, Missouri. Because it is important in a book like this to familiarize ourselves with the arguments used against apostles, I will quote Assemblies of God leaders from time to time. I would not want this to lead to the conclusion that I am singling out the Assemblies of God, but the fact is that the most explicit arguments currently in print originate from them. If the Presbyterians, the Christian Reformed Church, the Free Methodists, the Congregationalists or other denominations had published official statements on the subject, I would have quoted from them as well, but to my knowledge they have not. [34]

There are indicators within the movement that some share the opinion of Wagner. Citing the reaction of the Assemblies of God to the Latter Rain Movement in the decade following World War II, it is a matter of record that the Assemblies of God position was not to embrace the idea of modern-day apostles. "The teaching that the church is built on the foundation of present day apostles and prophets [is] erroneous."[35]

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[34] Wagner, *Churchquake!,* 134–135.

[35] Assemblies of God, April 1947 Minutes, Resolution 7: The New Order of the Latter Rain, *General Council Minutes and Reports 1914–1999* (Springfield, MO: J. R. Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center) 22.

In defense of the young movement, there were an abundance of excesses and abuses both in terms of authority and doctrine, but others felt that the Assemblies of God, fresh from a history-making revival, missed an opportunity to help lead a subrevival to maturity. In fact, it was probably a no-win situation for the Assemblies, as some in the revival movement proved unteachable and seemingly beyond correction.

When the New Apostolic Movement began to surface in the 1990s, the Assemblies of God responded. The document asserts the "teaching that present day offices of apostles and prophets should govern church ministry [is] a departure from Scripture and [is] deviant teaching."[36]

While advocating the establishment of new governmental structures, many pastors are discovering that the denomination is not opposed to strong leadership, but it insists that such leadership proceeds from pastors within the context of some form of congregational government. Insistence upon the idea of present-day apostles meets with such opposition that Pentecostal leaders such as David Cartledge, who was a leader in the Australian Assemblies of God until his death in 2005, refer to the American Assemblies of God as "Pentecostal Cessationists."[37] Cartledge cites the growth of the Australian branch of the Assemblies of God as validation for Apostolic Government.

> A report was presented to their 1993 General Council from the Spiritual Life Committee. It showed that in many parts of the Assemblies of God spiritual draught was approaching alarming proportions. Seven thousand fewer people received the baptism in the Holy Spirit in 1992 than 10 years earlier despite [adding] 400,000 more adherents. Almost 1/3 of the USA Assemblies did not report a single convert in 1992. . . . The Sunday attendance of their churches also

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[36] Assemblies of God, "Apostles and Prophets," positional statement, approved as the official statement by the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God on 6 August 2001

[37] Cartledge, 133–138.

> showed an alarming trend with an average gain of only one person per church year for the previous ten years. Almost 1/3 of churches did not contribute one cent for missions in the previous year.[38]

Those unwilling to accept a more moderate view find Cartledge's argument sound.

> The very fact that Paul found it necessary to identify false prophets enforces one to believe that there was an acceptance of Apostles beyond the scope of the original twelve who served Christ during His earthly ministry. (See also 2 Corinthians 11:13 and Revelation 2:2, which was written at the close of what is described as the 'Apostolic Age')."This shows there was no thought in the early church of restricting the apostleship to twelve men. Had no further apostolic ministry existed, these interlopers would have been condemned outright. Their false professions would have been easily exposed by the fact that no new Apostles existed.[39]

Proponents of those restoring the office (as opposed to merely the function) of apostle cite others in the New Testament that are described as apostles, though there is strong disagreement as to the actual meaning of the word *apostolos* and its possible translation as *messenger*. Cartledge's list includes: Matthias in Acts 1:26, Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:1, Barnabas in Acts 14:14, Andronicus and Junia in Romans 16:7, James, the brother of Jesus in Galatians 1:19, Titus in Titus 1:5, Epaphroditas in Philippians 2:25, Silas and Timothy listed along with Paul in 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2:6, and Apollos in 1 Corinthians 4:6–9.[40] Depending upon how one interprets the word used in these texts, at least some of as many as twenty-six individuals are named as apostles in the New Testament.

Most models of apostolic government acknowledge that there are levels of

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[38] Ibid., 148–154.

[39] Cartledge, 247-248

[40] Cartledge, 248.

apostolic anointing. The Twelve are seen as foundational apostles, and they are perceived as unique in their role and purposes just as the seventy "sent ones" by Jesus were limited to a sphere of ministry that was less than that of the foundational apostles (Luke 10:1). Modern proponents of apostolic models see a multilayered tier of apostles who function within the church (See Peter Wagner's *New Apostolic Churches*).

Although the legitimacy of all apostolic models of government are beyond the scope of this project, the preceding information helps frame the problem associated with abandoning the congregational government system. Barbara Tuchman, in her book *The Guns of August*, says that it is virtually impossible to pin down the cause of World War I. The same may be true in this situation. The heart of this issue with many Assemblies of God ministers is not the desire to be *called apostles*, but rather to be released to *function apostolically*. The General Council has no problem with that, but sees it occurring within the restrictive framework of congregational rule. I truly believe both parties want the same thing, but at present there is no significant neutral ground where meaningful exchange can occur. The Christian Life Assembly leadership team determined that our "line in the sand" would not be drawn over titles, but over the issue of who it is that is *responsible* for, and therefore, who *leads* the local church.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature related to this project is categorized into three primary sections:

1. Historical writings from the general period of the founding of the Assemblies of God (late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sources).
2. Assemblies of God documentation of this and related issues.
3. Current literature showing trends and developing concepts along the lines of new government models for churches.

Historical Writings

Historical writings frame the context into which the Assemblies of God was born. Generally these works are heavy on biblical scholarship, but are somewhat tainted by a strong sense of republicanism, which was particularly strong after the Civil War (1861–1865). Another observation is that the idea of "congregational government" is defined in terms of antiCatholicism, especially in light of the Twentieth Vatican Council and the action taken December 8, 1869, and October 20, 1870. The doctrine of *Ex Cathedra* (literally, *from the chair)* fueled protestant concerns about the idea of increasing papal authority. The official position of the Roman Catholics strengthened the influence and control of Pope Blessed Pius IX, as well as that of all subsequent pontiffs.

> We teach and define that it is a dogma Divinely revealed that the Roman pontiff when he speaks ex cathedra, that is when in discharge of the office of pastor and

> doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, by the Divine assistance promised to him in Blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed in defining doctrine regarding faith or morals, and that therefore such definitions of the Roman pontiff are of themselves and not from the consent of the Church irreformable.[1]

Though the declaration was meaningless outside the Roman Church, Protestants took a stand against the idea of any loss of control in regard to local church matters. This view is reflected strongly in the literature of the day in regard to church governance.

In 1889 Oxford University presented *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* by Edward Hatch. Hatch presented a strong case for a centrally controlled church, but did so while keeping Roman structures at arm's length. The Anglican viewpoint was prevalent, and though American congregationalism was not embraced, the Catholic doctrine of the Pope's infallibility was strongly rejected.[2] He does make allowances for the possibility, however, that nontraditional church government forms could evolve if unique cultural environments necessitated it.[3]

In 1871 and 1872 Dr. Adin Ballou delivered a series of lectures in Hopedale, Massachusetts, that were printed in 1900 under the title *Primitive Christianity and Its Corruptions* in 1900. Ballou's lectures reflect the antiCatholic sentiment of the period and deal more with Papal abuses than with any substantive ideas for church government.

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[1] Arthur Scanlan, *1914 Catholic Encyclopedia,* CD Rom Edition, s.v. "Ex Cathedra" (New Advent, 2003).

[2] Edwin Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* (New York: Longmans Green, London, 1880), xxvii.

[3] Ibid., 21–34.

He does, however, make a detailed case for an "independent and self-subsisting true church."[4]

One of the strongest advocates for congregational government was found in an 1865 book by a Boston pastor, Henry M. Dexter. Its title is *Congregationalism: What it is; Whence it is; How it works; Why it is Better Than Any Other Form of Church Government; and Its Consequent Demands.*

Dexter attacks both Roman and Reformed theologies, citing independent, lay-led committees, as the only legitimate form of government for a New Testament church. One of the most comprehensive works of this period is *Church Government: A Treatise,* written in 1888 by Princeton professor Alexander T. McGill. As a Presbyterian, McGill is strong on elder-rule, but leaves the primary administration of the church in the hands of a lay council, and makes what I believe is a weak delineation between the *business affairs* of the church and the *spiritual mission* which must be undertaken. He sees congregationalism as expressed in ranks. The minister may lead, but only at the pleasure of the congregation. The latter portion of the book is effectively a manual for the formation of a church which functions under congregational rule complete with elections, options for pastoral termination, etc.[5]

The literature of this period supports the idea espoused by Dr. Ed Nelson. His view is that the Assemblies of God came into being at a time when American Republicanism, the rise of antiCatholic sentiment, and the Industrial Revolution

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[4] Adin Ballou, *Primitive Christianity and Its Corruptions* (Lowell, MA: Thompson and Hill Printers, 1900), 74–81, 310–314.

[5] Henry M. Dexter, *Congregationalism: What it is; Whence it is; How it Works; Why it is Better Than Any Other Form of Church Government; and Its Consequent Demands* (Boston: Nichols and Noyes, 1865).

converged into a mighty stream of independent, congregational-style thinking. The American church saw itself as a business, the minister was an employee, and each church member was a shareholder of the entity known as the local church.[6]

Other works flowed out of this context, though published well into the twentieth century. A rehashing of the antiCatholic arguments are found in *The Apostolic Church: Which Is It?* by Thomas Witherow. The author stops short of asserting that there is only one true church, thereby extending an olive branch to Catholic theologians. He does insist on a standard for "holy living," which is the foundational requirement for membership in the true church of Christ.[7]

Adding credibility to Hatch's assertions that church life, including the form of government, may indeed be evolutionary in some way, Carl Dudley and Earle Hilgert wrote *New Testament Tensions and Contemporary Church.* This book does an excellent job of blending quality scholarship, contemporary experience and Godly wisdom into a handbook for processing conflict and change in the context of the local church.

> New members must be socialized into and shaped by the language and vision of the church community. [In addition] . . . the language and vision of the church must be shaped by the transcendent relationship with God in Jesus Christ. In chapter one, individuals share the vocabulary and values of the church, while in chapter five the church community and its members individually in the *mysterion* renew their tensions that were significant in shaping the early church, and remain as elemental forces in the development of contemporary congregations. In the *ekklesia*, we have tensions of language and vision, of the intimate community and the structural society. By a commitment to God's poor, the *ptochoi,* we reject the values of the world and confirm the love of God in action. In faith, *pistis,* we cross over the threshold of cognitive dissonance with such energy that we want to bring others with us. Our search for shalom, *eirene,* makes conflict with the world

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[6] Ed Nelson, The Hebraic Model of Church Government, 1.

[7] Thomas Witherow, *The Apostolic Church: Which Is It?* (Londonderry: Abshead and Son, 1955), 14, 34, 38, 42.

> both essential and constructive. In rituals of structure and *mysterion,* we maintain the order while renewing the spiritual life of the church. These do not occur in isolation, but each reinforces the others and needs the others for the full development of community. Taken together, these are constructive tensions in the social dynamic of Christian experience, then and now.[8]

Concisely stated, Dudley and Hilgert see the eternal, spiritual aspects of church life being framed by cultural settings. Though containing the same portrait of Christ in every culture, the frame into which the portrait is set may differ greatly from one place to another.

The mindset of American Republicanism is seen in Coriden's study, *We, The People Of God–: A Study Of Constitutional Government For The Church.* Coriden traces attempts of congregational government from the Council of Constance (1414–1418)[9] until recent days. This book differs from the rest of the bibliographic sources because it is a call toward congregationalism within the context of the Roman Catholic Church. Building his case upon the Council of Constance, Coriden points out that the second of three chief goals dealt with ecclesiastical government. The forty-five general sessions were devoted to the "Extinction of the So-Called Western Schism; the Reformation of Ecclesiastical Government and Life; and the Repression of Heresy"[10]

Two other books, *Democritization in the Church*, edited by Alois Muller, and *The Tabu of Democracy Within the Church*, edited by James Provost and Knut Wolf, deal

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[8] Carl Dudley and Earle Hilgert, *New Testament Tensions and Contemporary Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 147–148.

[9] Arthur Scanlan, *1914 Catholic Encyclopedia*, CD Rom Edition, s.v. "*The Council of Constance.*" (New Advent, 2003).

[10] James A.Coriden, ed., *We, The People Of God—: A Study Of Constitutional Government For The Church.* Papers prepared by participants or resulting from proceedings of the symposium entitled 'A constitution for the church,' sponsored by the Canon Law Society of America and Fordham University New York City on October 7–9, 1967.

with historic models of congregationalism. Wolf and Provost are heavy on church history documents, especially within the framework of Catholicism. Muller makes the case that the church, "a community free of rule," has always been congregational in government, even in its earliest days.[11]

One final source concerning the historical literature is *Church Ministries in New Testament Times* by Manuel Miguens. Although the author frequently stops short of resolving questions concerning church government, he does provide excellent resource from early church literature. He deals with the concept of apostles in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Book of Acts, and attempts to give clarity to issues such as apostolic succession, celibacy, and the role of women in ministry. He researches the Didache, as well as the writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch and Clement of Rome. While the book does not directly address congregationalism, it does provide a foundation for understanding the Catholic position and the historical view Catholics have held concerning apostolic ministry.

Assemblies of God Documentation

Extensive research was done in this area to accurately determine both the context of the formation of the Assemblies of God, as well as to trace of governmental issues as the denomination developed.

The Assemblies of God did not form within a vacuum. The denomination came into existence during a time of great social and theological unrest. Liberalism from European theologians, as well as the threat of economic instability and a world war, was heavy on the minds of many American Christians. The story of the early days is

[11] Alois Muller, *Democritization of the Church* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 48–59.

documented well in *Anointed to Serve* by Assemblies of God college professor William Menzies. Historian Edith Blumhofer wrote *The Assemblies of God: A Popular History* and edited *Pentecost in My Soul: Reflections On The Early Days Of The Outpouring*. All three books are an enjoyable and informative look at the early days of the Assemblies of God, but there is little discussion of church government except to point out the earliest affiliation was for the purpose of (1) recognition of approved ministries, (2) the establishment of a publishing business in order to provide Pentecostal study material, and (3) provision of necessary documentation for missionaries traveling abroad. A review of the *Word and Witness* newspaper supports the idea that ministers and churches were invited to come together for the purpose of linking those who were involved in the Pentecostal outpouring in an attempt to enhance fellowship and to bring unity in critical doctrinal areas. There was special emphasis that the purpose was not to form a denomination, nor to create uniformity in style, methods, or approach.[12]

A look at the first General Council minutes confirms the same:

> Some 14 years ago, in answer to prayer, the Lord began to pour out His Spirit in Kansas, then in Texas; and some eight years ago it reached Los Angeles, Cal., and from California it soon became scattered over the civilized world. It has been so aggressive—that almost every city and community in civilization has heard of the Latter Rain outpouring of the Holy Ghost, with many signs following, and not only has civilization been affected to more or less degree, but hundreds of missionaries have consecrated themselves and gone forth until almost every country on the globe has heard the message and also the prophecy which has been predominant in all this great outpouring, which is "Jesus is coming soon" to this old world in the same manner as he left it to set up His millennial kingdom and to reign over the earth in righteousness and peace for a thousand years.
>
> As is true in all great religious awakenings, as evidenced by past history, all kinds of chaotic conditions have been manifested and as this great movement of God has no man nor set of men at the head of it but God to guide and mold it into Scriptural paths by the Holy Spirit, individualism has been "the human order of the day," every man being a law unto himself, and consequently that Scriptural

[12] Stanley Frodsham, "Call to Hot Springs," *Word and Witness,* December 1913.

> co-operation and fellowship which go far to guarantee the presence and power of God have not been realized in the fullest measure, but as we appropriate the divine order we shall experience the divine presence and power in this respect.
>
> The Pentecostal saints in the United States and Canada especially have seen this great need of co-operation, fellowship and unity, according to the Scriptures, and have felt such a great need of the same in the Home and Foreign Mission work that in different parts of the country brethren have undertaken, we believe in the name of Jesus, to accomplish this end, but seemingly God has a more Scriptural basis and method and a broader field and a greater work than has been accomplished.
>
> Several months ago, men's hearts were calling on God for help to adjust these matters and open the way by which the Ministerial, Missionary, Publishing and School interests might be advanced to the glory of God. And we believe in answer to our heart's cry, a number of representative workers of the Pentecostal movement in various parts of the country, called a General Council to be held at Hot Springs, Ark., April 2–12, 1914.[13]

A review of the Minutes of the General Councils of the Assemblies of God from 1914 until 1953 gives no indication of concern about church government, though by 1947 there is stipulation against ministers assuming a "dictatorial authority over local assemblies."[14] The literature review indicates that church government was not a significant issue in at least the first two generations of the Assemblies of God. Further, sources reveal that not until the 1960s was there significant change in denominational governance. Under the leadership of Thomas Zimmerman (General Superintendent from 1959 until 1985), the denomination was streamlined and authority of the denomination became more centralized. In 1969 a five-year Plan of Advance was introduced which seemed to reflect the internal structural changes.[15]

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[13] Assemblies of God, April 1914 Minutes, *General Council Minutes and Reports 1914–1999* (Springfield, MO: J. R. Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center), 1.

[14] Ibid., 1947 Minutes, Spiritual Life Report, 2.

[15] Ibid., 1969 Minutes, 16.

Flowing (to greater or lesser extent) from this period of reconstruction were such works as *Origin and Structural Development of the Assemblies of God* by Mario Hoover, *Under the Glass: An Analysis of Church Structure* by Charles Harris, and *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads* by Margaret Poloma.

Two works aggressively address the issue of church government. Both are written from the context of opposition to apostolic forms of government promoted by authors such as Peter Wagner and David Cartledge.

The first book is published by the Assemblies of God and is titled *Where We Stand: The Official Position Papers of the Assemblies of God.* The book is a compilation of official responses from the General Presbytery to controversial issues between the years 1970 and 2003. Topics include the inerrancy of scripture, the question of whether can born-again believers can be demon possessed, the security of the believer, the rapture of the Church, the biblical perspective on gambling, etc. Two chapters in particular deal with church government.

The first of the chapters, *Deacons and Trustees* (1976), deals with several options the local assembly may embrace to form its governmental structure. Though essentially congregational in its recommendations, the document is designed to give churches several legal structures from which to choose. The second chapter, *Apostles and Prophets* (2001), draws the conclusion that there are no present-day apostles and prophets, and encourages congregations to structure under a more traditional form of government (congregational). As has been previously discussed, the conclusions drawn are still somewhat divisive within the ranks of Assemblies of God pastors.

The second book is *He Gave Apostles: Apostolic Ministry in the 21st Century*, edited by Edgar R. Lee and published by the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary. The contributors in this book do an excellent job of presenting the problems associated with the idea of apostle and prophet as an *office* within the church. They acknowledge both apostolic and prophetic dynamics in the present church, but stop short of endorsing Cartledge's view.[16]

Another source from within the Assemblies of God is *The Apostolic Revolution: The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets in the Assemblies of God of Australia.* The author is David Cartledge, who at the time of writing was President of Southern Cross College of the Assemblies of God in Australia (Sydney). Cartledge is experienced as a church planter in Tasmania, South Wales, and Queensland. His phenomenal success as State Superintendent and Assemblies of God National Executive expanded his ministry to over forty nations. Before his death in 2005, Cartledge was seen as an unofficial leader of the New Apostolic Movement (as defined by Peter Wagner) that has been embraced by a number of Assemblies of God congregations in the United States. The International Coalition of Apostles, an organization formed by Peter Wagner, David Cartledge, and others, is an example of the fellowship groups being formed by those embracing the New Apostolic Movement.

Cartledge's book is considered foundational to the apostolic school of thought because it deals not only with Biblical issues regarding the apostolic, but also with the story of how actual transformation took place on both local church and denominational levels. Whether or not one embraces Cartledge's exegesis of New Testament texts, the

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[16] Edgar Lee, ed., *He Gave Apostles: Apostolic Ministry in the 21st Century* (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2005), 141, 160–167.

story of the turnaround of the Australian Assemblies of God is phenomenal. The introduction of the new leadership model occurred in 1977. At that time the number of Australian Assemblies of God congregations was about 150. By 1997 the number had reached nearly 900. In the forty years between 1937 and 1977 there had been an increase from 50 to 150 churches. Under the new leadership model the same organization saw an increase of nearly 700 churches in a twenty-year time span. In 2005 the number had grown to nearly 1200. As of January 2005 there had not been a single defection of churches from the Australian fellowship since the 1977 governance model change.[17]

Cartledge explains that two types of growth took place as a result of the adaptation of the New Apostolic Model. First of all, there was a multiplication in the number of churches. Secondly, there was a significant increase in the size of churches. "At that time [1977], there were 150 churches with an average size of sixty people per congregation. Twenty-three years later there are more than 950 churches. The average size of these congregations is 147 people.[18]

In particular, the shift from local congregational government is cited as one of the catalysts of change.

> In the early 1970s almost every Assembly of God in the nation functioned under "congregational government," with the control of the church being vested in a board of elders or deacons. This type of church organization is totally incompatible with apostolic leadership. . . . It was not the lack of gifts and abilities in the early leaders that reduced their effectiveness and stifled the development of the churches. It was an over-dependence on organization and procedures that caused many of the early Pentecostal churches in Australia to become fruitless for decades. The new group of apostolic leaders in the Assemblies of God confronted this problem independently of each other but virtually at the same time. They created a paradigm of church life that has allowed

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[17] Cartledge, The Apostolic Revolution, 5.

[18] Ibid., 381–382.

> them to be driven by vision and values instead of allowing the dissenters to be the deciders. The other coincidental effect was that the national and state conferences that had been an echo of the congregational forms of government also changed. Instead of endless debate over meaningless issues with the loudest voices being the least qualified to speak, the conferences have developed into inspirational and impartational conventions that focus on motivating the pastors to successful ministry.[19]

A final source from within the Assemblies of God is the chart "Roles and Offices of the First Century Church"[20] and his paper "First Century Church Order and Structure," written by Dr. Ed Nelson, an Assemblies of God pastor, missionary evangelist, and founder of Bellwether Ministries. Dr. Nelson contends for the view that the early church operated under a Hebraic Model fostered by the Apostle Paul.

> During the first century, church order and organization was the same as the synagogue at the time of Jesus and the early apostles. They were identical in concept for at least one to two hundred years or more after the resurrection of our Lord. By AD 90, synagogues hostile to the gospel changed their liturgy to deny that Jesus was Lord, moving away somewhat from the normative synagogue during Jesus' time sixty years earlier. This forced Jewish believers within those synagogues to form new synagogues where Messiah was worshipped as Lord. The overall order and organization remained essentially the same.[21]

Nelson traces historical accounts to indicate the transition from traditional synagogue to "Messiah-friendly synagogue" to church structures even among the Gentile congregations. The scriptural qualifications for leadership (elders, deacons, widows, etc.) are explained in the context of synagogue life in the first century. Specific topics include

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[19] Ibid., 386–387.

[20] Ed Nelson, "Roles and Offices of the First Century Church" (D.Min. diss., Bellwether Ministries, Anderson, South Carolina, 2000) chart. See appendix 1.

[21] Nelson, "First Century Church Order and Structure" (D.Min. diss., Bellwether Ministries, Anderson, South Carolina, 2000), 2–3. See appendix 3.

qualifications of leadership, maturity in life, prophetic gifting, and discipleship by imitation.[22]

In discussing the formation of a synagogue or "House of Study," Nelson illustrates the formation of churches within the context of the Jewish mindset:

> To form a synagogue or "house of study" (*beit midrash*) ten men were required. They were called *batlanim* (literally "men of leisure"). More than ten *batlanim*, of course, could serve the congregation. The unusual phrase "men of leisure" did not mean they were lazy. On the contrary, they were busy at the work of the synagogue or church. What the term "leisure" means is that they were of sufficient financial means or support to give ample time to the synagogue to study and teach the Torah, Prophets and Writings, and to care for the congregation.
>
> In both normative and Messianic synagogues, batlanim must be devout Torah teachers of good report. In Messianic congregations, they included prophets.
>
> Seven of them were called "the good men of the city." This number included:
>
> - One *chazan* (public minister).
> - Three *nesi'im* or *ro'im* (rulers or judges).
> - Three *almoners* or *parnasin* (deacons).
>
> Supporting roles of the 'seven good men of the city' were:
>
> - The *meturganim* (interpreter) of the *chazzan.*
> - The *shammash* (servant) or *shiliach* (messenger) of the *Bet Din* (the court).
> - The *rabbi* of the academy or upper synagogue.
> - The *maturganim* (interpreter) of the *rabbi.*
> - Assistant teachers to the *rabbi.*
>
> We shall discover what these roles were in the earliest formations of the church. Jesus did not render obsolete nor alter in any way [these concepts].[23]

Considerable detail is given explaining the significance of the 120 on the Day of Pentecost, as well as the parallel terms that have come to identify contemporary church life. Nelson may be summarized as follows:

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[22] Ibid., 2–5.

[23] Ibid., 5–6.

1. The *chazzan* was seen as the overseer of the congregation, and is seen also as "the angel of the congregation" or "the apostle of the congregation" (Revelation 2 and 3). This was the role of the apostles who served the church in Jerusalem. Timothy's work as described by Paul was that of a *chazzan* (1 Timothy 4:12, 13).
2. The *Nasi* (President) or *Nesi'im* (Presidents) meant "one who presides." It is comparable with archisynagogo meaning "ruler of the synagogue." In the well-established Messianic synagogues, there were three rulers, one of whom was called the "Chief Ruler." It is apparent that James fulfilled this role in the Jerusalem church. They were the court described in 1 Corinthians 6:1.
3. According to Nelson, the Apostle Paul in Philippians 1:1 addresses (1) the righteous ones or saints (*kiddushim* concept), (2) overseers or rulers (*nesi'im* concept), and (3) the deacons (*gabbay tzedikah* concept).
4. The *nesi'im* were the "shepherd-rulers" of the synagogue (as seen in Mark 5:22). They ruled the sages (Torah teachers) and presided over congregational life and practices. Nelson explains that the *Mashgiach Ruchani* was known as "the Spiritually Highest One," or "the greatest one."

> According to the Hebrew New Testament, the passage in 1 Timothy 3:1 refers to the *Mashgiach Ruchani*.
>
> Faithful is the word: if anyone aspires to be the *Mashgiach Ruchani*, he is desirous of a good work. It is necessary then that the *Mashgiach Ruchani* be irreproachable, husband of one wife, sober, serious, well-behaved, hospitable, apt to teach, not given to wine, not a striker, not greedy of disgraceful gain, but gentle like Messiah, not contentious, not loving money; ruling his own house well, so he can rule the House of God well, having his children in subjection with all dignity…not a novice…and it is necessary for him to have a good testimony from the outside. [24]

[24] Ibid., 9–10.

The level of Messianic authority and respect the *Mashgiach Ruchani* had in the early days of the church was indisputable. Nelson sees this concept further elaborated in Ephesians 4:11, and can be summarized as following:

1. In Ephesians 4:11, the five spiritual gifts given by Messiah to the church are listed. These five gifts are apostles (shlichim), prophets (nevi'im), evangelists (mevasserim), shepherd rulers (ro'im) and Torah teachers (morim ha Torah). They were all elders responsible to build up the congregation for worship of God and service to man, and to present them to the Lord as mature disciples.
2. The "Court of Three Judges" is seen as descriptive of the ruling elders. Nelson sees this idea in 1 Corinthians 6:1–11, 1 Corinthians 14:40 and in 1 Corinthians 14:29–30.
3. The Shaliach Bet Din, the messenger of the court, illustrates the concept of apostle.
4. The almoners are those who "care for the widows" or are "feeders" (parnasin), whose job is to collect and distribute the funds (gabbay tzedikah --"collectors of righteousness").
5. The Rabbi, or master teacher, was another of the ten leaders of the synagogue. Nelson devotes several pages to the elaboration of the duties associated with the rabbi.
6. Evangelists (mevasserim) were seen as migratory ministers who went ahead to extend an invitation to those who wanted to start a synagogue, or later, a church. [25]

This summary is a condensation of Nelson's work. One of his organizational charts is included in the appendix.

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[25] Ibid., 10.

Transition Resources

The final section of resources deals with developing concepts in churches that have experienced transition away from traditional congregational government structures. Church consultant Bill Easum produced a trio of books that have been the catalyst for much transition from traditional structures. They became the philosophical basis for the transition at Christian Life Assembly. The theme of the book is "thinking beyond what was." *Beyond the Box: Innovative Churches That Work* discusses the concept of multiplication of the local church by embracing a new paradigm of church life. The concepts are solid, but require real stretching on the part of traditional pastors and church leaders. Easum says it is possible to move beyond mediocre results by developing the local church as a "multiplication movement." This is presented as so revolutionary that "thinking outside the box" isn't enough. Easum's principles necessitate radical thinking "beyond the box."

Ideas include:

1. Expanding the church's influence by developing a multisite concept.
2. Becoming "*part of the church* in a city" as opposed to being simply "*a church* in a city."
3. The move toward team-driven leadership as opposed to what Easum identifies as the "Mythic Hero" model.
4. The move to a culture of equipping and enabling the entire church to find a place of service.

5. The philosophy that each new site produces more new sites hence, multiplication occurs instead of addition.[26]

Of particular value is the section that highlights the strategy of successful transitional churches.

Easum also wrote *Dancing with Dinosaurs* and *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers.* In *Dancing with Dinosaurs* Easum makes a case for the idea that the traditional church is in danger of slipping into extinction through irrelevance and cultural insensitivity.

> Before long, many of Christian congregations will be perceived as cuddly, sentimental creatures who are studied primarily as skeletons in the halls of a museum. The church is in danger of becoming a dinosaur. We live in a secular or unchurched world, but the church continues to develop ministries as if we were in charge of a churched society. If we continuously fail to prepare our message for an anti-Christian world, we will disappear like the dinosaurs.[27]

As the earliest of Easum's works, the emphasis is on the fact of cultural change, making a case that the old wineskin is inadequate. He highlights sixteen shifts that are called "cracks in history,"[28] and explains how the church can become community centered instead of remaining pastor and program centered.

In *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers* Easum's emphasis is on disarming critics of transition and facilitating effective and life-giving change. This is particularly helpful to church leaders that are laboring in a strong committee-led organization. The theme is "becoming a permission-giving church."

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[26] Bill Easum, *Beyond The Box: Innovative Churches That Work* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2003), 27–41.

[27] Bill Easum, *Dancing with Dinosaurs* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 12–13.

[28] Ibid., 24–35.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Thom S. Rainer wrote two books that seem to contradict Easum's paradigm. Rainer is also a church consultant and founding dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism, and Church Growth at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

His concern is for the inherent dangers faced by transitional churches. In *Giant Awakenings* he expresses his concern for doctrinal purity and ethical standards he feels have been compromised by many transitional churches. Citing a number of traditional churches that are growing, Rainer makes his case that the report of the demise of the traditional church is "a premature obituary."[29]

He sees ten "giant awakenings" in the traditional church that prove it is still a vital and viable entity.

1. The Great Prayer Movement
2. The Rediscovery of the Bible in Theology
3. The Renewal of the Sunday School
4. The New Understanding of Culture
5. The New Traditional Church Layperson
6. The New Traditional Church Pastor
7. Evangelism Renewal
8. The Emphasis on Church Planting
9. The Acceptance of Multiple Worship Styles
10. Wonders and Miraculous Signs[30]

In *Breakout Churches* Rainer shares the results of a survey that included nearly 50,000 of the estimated 400,000 churches in America. The book focuses on thirteen churches that Rainer and his team labeled as "breakout churches." Each of the churches had experienced a period of decline, as well as sustained breakout growth, under the leadership of the same pastor. *Breakout Churches* tells the story of these churches and

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[29] Thom S. Rainer, *Giant Awakenings* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 1–16.

[30] Ibid., 17–185.

approaches each scenario from the perspective of statistics and shared traits that produced the seeds of success.

Both of Rainer's books make a strong case for the traditional church structure. Like Easum, he acknowledges the need for innovation even within the traditional church.

> Innovation in the church is nothing new. Remember bus ministries? And the two most common responses to innovation, traditionalist/resistor and innovator/embracer, have been the most common responses. Rare is the church that takes the road less traveled demonstrated by the breakout churches.[31]

Rainer's works caused us to slow down considerably and reevaluate what we perceived as good change. After readdressing the issues we held to our conclusions that a major overhaul was necessary for Christian Life Assembly. We did, however, come to the conclusion that our changes were tailor-made for us, and that each local congregation had to wrestle through these issues within their own unique culture.

One observation was that 13 out of 50,000 churches is not a good percentage. It was enough, however, for us to acknowledge that the traditional church did indeed continue to meet the needs of a certain pocket of American society. Rainer acknowledges the same concept:

> We want to be clear that innovation cannot be evaluated "good or bad" out of context. In one church, a particular innovation may be a spectacular addition for the good of the church. In another church, the adoption of that same innovation may be a formula for disaster. We noted very few innovations in our research that would always be bad or always be good. Discernment is the key.[32]

A much more aggressive approach to change was found in Peter Wagner's writing. *Churchquake!* (1999) and *Changing Church* (2004) dealt with trends within

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[31] Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishers, 2005), 152.

[32] Ibid., 153.

what are described as the New Apostolic Churches. Wagner deals with characteristics of these churches, citing identifying marks:

1. The churches are driven by vision.
2. The pastors operate in apostolic giftings.
3. The worship is "cutting edge" and generationally sensitive.
4. The outreach is aggressive.
5. The laity is trained for ministry.
6. The giving is generous.
7. The shift is from local church emphasis toward kingdom involvement.
8. There is an increased involvement in "spiritual warfare."
9. The goal is the transformation of society.
10. There is less emphasis on theological education.
11. There is little emphasis on doctrinal matters.
12. There is an emphasis on personal holiness.[33]

Wagner's list of apostolic churches is almost all pentecostal, and there is a somewhat natural emphasis on controversial areas such as spiritual warfare and the place of spiritual gifts in the life of the church. Critics are concerned when Dr. Wagner cites the diminished role of doctrinal statements and formal theological training in these churches. If one takes time to really listen to what Wagner says, the concerns are greatly alleviated, but the danger these churches face is that the experience and emphasis can become dangerously out of balance without adequate doctrinal foundation. Wagner knows this, and the problem may not find expression until another generation passes off the scene.

At Christian Life Assembly we found a common thread in both New Apostolic Churches and in the Breakout Churches: *life* and *relevance.* Balancing the approaches of Easum, Rainer, and Wagner, we committed ourselves to a structure that would facilitate new life and exhibit relevance within the culture to which we had been assigned in the providence of God.

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[33] Wagner, *Churchquake!,* 49–53.

It was concluded that Rainer's approach, though certainly legitimate, would be painfully slow and laborious for us. We also determined that our congregation was very open to change and new ideas. We felt confident that we could move forward with considerable momentum because of the personality of Christian Life Assembly, which was a match with Wagner's apostolic model more so than with Rainer's breakout churches.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Project Goal

The following five points summarize the goal of transformation to a postdenominational model of church government for Christian Life Assembly.

1. To create, promote, and maintain a corporate environment that will ensure spiritual vitality, numerical growth, cultural relevance, and measurable success lived out in the context of the Great Commission.[1]
2. In order for this to occur we must address the issues of church structure in regard to personnel, ecclesiastical governance, clarity of purpose, and legal proprieties.
3. The measurable goals include the identification of mission and vision, a revamped structure of governance, the embracing of core values, a change in the ethos of the church family, and the creation of a philosophy of church ministry that is a reflection of those values.
4. The mission and ethos must be reproducible in the next generation of the Christian Life Assembly family.
5. Christian Life Assembly should serve as a model for the churches of the South Carolina District of the Assemblies of God.

[1] Matthew 28:19, 20.

Implementation of the Project

The project will be reported under the following headings:

1. Contextual Issues – an evaluation of the unique setting that is experienced by Christian Life Assembly in Columbia, South Carolina.
2. Concept – how is the culture we seek to develop understood in terms of mission, values, and vision?
3. Communication – how will these changes become a part of congregational life?
4. Culture of Life – what is understood and lived out as the special ethos of our congregation?
5. Chronology – what timeline and process of events will we embrace for the completion of the project?
6. Continuation – is success in this project measurable and reproducible?

It should be noted that our plan was not intact from the beginning. We endured false starts and abandoned plans. In retrospect, we feel that this six-step process is foundational to ministry changes that will survive in a changing culture.

Contextual Issues

Change does not occur in a vacuum. The decision to pursue change in the fiber of life at Christian Life Assembly is a result of the flowing together of three strong currents. First of all, I personally was ripe for change. I had experienced some pastoral venues which were counterproductive to the health of my faith and family. As a veteran of several church and denominational "turf wars," I found myself bearing scars that made me doubtful I wanted to pursue further pastoral ministry. My prayer, as I found my

footing in Columbia, was, "Lord, I'm going to try this one more time. Please help me walk in your wisdom. Empower me to truly make a difference in the lives of your people and help us to bring spiritual life to the city of Columbia." As I embraced forgiveness both toward and from those with whom I had conflict, the bitterness of the past began to subside. The process had been slow, but I began to have a vision for what a truly spiritual church could become.

Secondly, the diversity of the Christian Life Assembly congregation lent itself not only to an acceptance of change, but also to a necessity of change. Only 8% of our church was from an Assemblies of God background. Untypical of an Assemblies congregation, nearly 40% of those in attendance were African American. As we grew in numbers, it became obvious that "sacred cows" were almost nonexistent. The men in leadership were men of tremendous integrity and maturity, but were of such diverse background that no undue attachment was placed on any style of ministry or denominational program. Finally, there seemed to be an unspoken rule that the goal in whatever we did was a sense of divine "life." There was almost no formal liturgy or tradition due to the great diversity of backgrounds, so the measuring rod of success for service, activities, and programs became a simple question—"Is it in the Bible and does it work?"

The early days have been previously discussed. By the end of 2000 the church increased to 715 in average attendance. In response to "growing pains" and occasional administrative dysfunction, the pastors and deacons of Christian Life Assembly set out to transition to what we would later identify as a postdenominational form of church government that would create an environment that would facilitate church ministry and streamline operations.

Our initial evaluation began by drawing from a broad spectrum of perspectives. In January of 2001 a coalition of departmental leaders, business leaders, charter members, recent converts, pastors, and deacons came together to discuss the strengths, weaknesses and ideas for change concerning the Christian Life Assembly community.

Problems identified included a concern about the disconnect between pastors, support staff, and lay leaders. Securing help from the office was often cumbersome and prolonged. Reminiscent of Acts 6, some in the African American community felt unrepresented in leadership and pastoral staff. There was also a consensus that there was too little oversight of departments. Past policy had encouraged a "minikingdom" mindset that was deeply ingrained in some departmental leadership. Perhaps the most significant problem was a feeling of fragmentation due to our two-service schedule on Sunday mornings. We were, in effect, two congregations sharing the same building and pastor.

To complicate issues further, deacons and other leaders were strangers to at least one congregation. The greatest challenge was the recognition that we would cease to grow because both services were approaching maximum capacity. On some Sundays people were seen leaving because of lack of parking, and latecomer families unable to find seating together would sometimes leave in frustration.

On the positive side, the church had almost doubled in attendance and was excited about the future. It was also obvious that a comprehensive plan to accommodate growth would be foundational to future success.

A task force of pastors, deacons, and key church members was asked to address the following diagnostic question: "If money were not an issue, if tradition had no hold, if we could totally dissolve the present administrative structure, if we could scrap all the

present programs, if we could reassemble as a brand new church, what would you want us to become?"

After several meetings throughout the spring of 2001, the following conclusions were reached:

1. We would shift from committee and board-driven ministry to one led by a pastor with the support of an administrative council.
2. We would invest heavily in the ministry to our children and teenagers.
3. We would finance only those ministries that were productive and life giving.
4. We would seek to become a community church, unique to our setting, instead of a church propelled by programs from state or national headquarters.
5. We would agree to minimize care and comfort of our constituency while maximizing care to the community.
6. We would release our pastors to an equipping ministry, thereby releasing the congregation to discover their own place of service in the Kingdom of God.
7. We would commit to building or securing a new worship facility in order to accommodate growth and anticipated ministries.[2]

The sentiment of the committee was that we should become a visible representation of God's kingdom through Jesus Christ in the greater Columbia area. Adapting the words of Ted Haggard: We want 'Columbia' to be a hard place to go to hell from![3]

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[2] Notes from Task Force meetings, Christian Life Assembly, Columbia, SC, 19 May 2001.

[3] Ted Haggard, "Life-Giving Church" (presentation made at the New Life Church Growth Clinic on 8 June 1997), New Life Church, Colorado Springs, CO.

These recommendations were submitted to the full pastoral staff and deacon board for further consideration. In the summer of 2001 we began the process of discussing what the church culture we were seeking to create would look like.

Concept

The shape of the future would need clarification on at least three levels in order to be recognized by the congregation and corporately pursued – mission, core values, and vision. By *Mission Statement*—we mean a concise statement that includes our basic theological approach and statement of faith reflected as our reason for being. By *Core Values*—we understand that while each church has a similar purpose or mission defining the basic reason for its existence, each church also has its own unique identity. The values of that congregation shape its identity. Therefore, "values are consistent, passionate, biblical convictions that determine our decisions, drive our ministry and are always demonstrated by our behavior."[4] By *Vision Statement*—we believe:

> Our values influence the way we feel ministry should be done. This picture of ministry that exists first in our minds and hearts is called "vision." Vision is a clear picture of a preferred future, which describes what this ministry will look like in three to five years. It develops positive mental images and pictures that motivate people.[5]

Mission Statement

Our mission, or purpose statement, was relatively easy to define. Our conviction is that every church should have the same mission, at least in the broad sense. In an

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[4] Patrick Fiore. Assemblies of God, *South Carolina District Transformation Manual 2005*, Columbia, SC, 2.

[5] Ibid., 2–3.

attempt to make our mission statement memorable for kids and adults alike, we followed in the footsteps of Rick Warren and adapted, with permission, the mission statement of Saddleback Community Church:[6] The mission of Christian Life Assembly is to bring people into *membership* in God's family through the new birth, to then bring each disciple to *maturity* of faith in order to equip them for their *ministry* while fulfilling our *mission* in order to *magnify* God's name in the earth. This is known as the "Five M's" in our church. Occasionally small bags of M&M's are distributed as an incentive to help parishioners commit the statement to memory.

The reason for our existence, was therefore explained in a way that helped everyone understand our starting point as we sought to redesign our church. This statement implied that we would be committed to evangelism, discipleship, service, and worship, all of which grew out of commitment to the Great Commission.[7] This statement would prove to be the simplest to develop and the quickest to be adopted.

In addition to our mission statement we adopted a motto which would symbolize our church. Based on our commitment to children and to the next generation of Christian Life Assembly members, we chose to use "Building Godly Generations" as our motto. It is on all our printed material and is probably more associated with our name in the community than anything else.

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[6] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 21.

[7] Matthew 28:19, 20.

Core Values

In regard to core values we were exploring new territory. The Assemblies of God had promoted a brief statement of core values,[8] but it was designed for use by all our churches and seemed too general to have any constructive value for our situation. Over the course of nearly two years pastors wrestled with the idea of "what do we really, really believe?" Stephen Covey says, "It's easy to say 'no' when there is a deeper 'yes' burning within."[9]

The process of developing core values required an evaluation both of what our actions said and what we believed our lifestyle should begin to reflect. In other words, our core values needed to reflect what was really important to us *and what really ought to be important to us.* We also discovered that genuine values are discovered only under stress. Values rise to the service during budgeting sessions, energy crisis, and time crunches.

For several meetings we prayed, repented, and struggled to identify our core beliefs. At one point our list was as high as thirty-two items. We realized that we needed a much narrower concept if we were to successfully identify the essentials. Our criteria were distilled to this series of questions: "What is irreducible, absolutely nonnegotiable, and positively essential?" By June 2003 we identified the following list:

Core Values

1. **Biblical Authority**—We believe God is speaking to us through the scriptures. Therefore, the Bible is our ultimate authority concerning all life's issues.

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[8] Clarensau, Michael H., Sylvia Lee, and Steven R. Mills, *We Build People.* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1998), 19–20.

[9] Fiore, 3.

2. **Intimacy with God**—We believe God desires an intimate relationship with every believer. Through consistent prayer, meditation, worship, and Bible study, we can pursue and enjoy intimacy with our Father.
3. **God's Empowering Presence**—We believe that through God's empowering presence lives are transformed. Therefore, we welcome Him in every venue of Christian Life Assembly, acknowledging our dependence upon His grace-filled presence.
4. **Culturally Relevant Environments**—We believe our role is to convey eternal truth by creating a variety of environments that are relevant to every generation and conducive to the work of the Holy Spirit.
5. **Relational Evangelism**—We believe that all Christ-followers share the responsibility of intentionally sharing the gospel within their network of relationships.
6. **Authentic Community**—We believe that accountability, care, and a sense of belonging are critical to balance and progress in our spiritual journey. These three things are best achieved within the context of a small group of relationally-connected believers.
7. **Partners in Ministry**—We believe there are ministry opportunities for every member of the Christian Life family. Ministry involvement should be in accordance to each person's spiritual gifts as well as to present needs within the church family.
8. **Intentional Apprenticing**—We believe that the key to success of "Building Godly Generations" is intentional apprenticing. Every experienced follower of Christ is responsible for passing along to others the knowledge, skills, and opportunities for service to others that God has entrusted to them.
9. **Pastors who are Servant-Leaders**—We believe in God-ordained leaders who model the Christian life and devote themselves to the care of the church family. The responsibility for the church rests upon their shoulders.

Once we successfully established our core values, the next step was to project an image of our preferred future – our vision statement.

Vision Statement

As noted earlier, our vision statement would be a clear picture of a preferred future. Robert Dale notes: "A healthy dream is a necessary foundation for a healthy

organization. Nothing less than a kingdom dream will turn a church toward healthy and aggressive ministry."[10]

Dr. Ken Hemphill, church growth specialist, discusses the special nature of vision:

> Proverbs 29:18 in the New International Version reads: "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint." Vision, then, does not refer to the ability to formulate goals and work toward them, but rather to the work of the prophet. Thus the verse is pointing to the guidance or revelation of God. The word "perish" in the King James Version is better rendered by more recent translations as "cast off restraint." The verse teaches that the nation or church that ignores God's Word can anticipate spiritual anarchy and lack of clear direction.[11]

Mission is permanently established, and core values change only with significant passing of time or circumstance, but vision is for the shorter term. Vision may change as goals are met or as circumstances and culture develop new scenarios. Therefore our vision should be attainable in the short term while remaining true to mission and core values.

Vision becomes the rallying point for the efforts of the church. Paul Borden teaches prospective pastors about vision this way:

> What you talk about all the time gets done. What you count gets done. What you budget for gets done. What you reward will get done. What you hire for will get done. What you celebrate will get done.[12]

This concept helped shape our new approach to ministry. Our first vision statement dealt with broad, attainable goals:

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[10] Ken Hemphill, *The Antioch Effect,* 129.

[11] Ibid., 129.

[12] Paul Borden, interview by author, written notes, Hilton Head, SC, 18 January 2005.

The Christian Life Vision
Acts 2:17, 18

- It is the dream of a place where the hurting, the lost, the depressed, the frustrated, and the confused can find love, acceptance, help, hope, forgiveness, guidance, and encouragement.

- It is the dream of sharing the good news of Christ Jesus with the hundreds of thousands of Columbia area residents. We begin with our local neighborhoods by becoming Lighthouses of Prayer.

- It is the dream of welcoming 2000 into the fellowship of this church family – each of us living, loving, and learning together.

- It is the dream of maturing each Believer through corporate worship services, small groups, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, and the Christian Life Institute.

- It is the dream of training and equipping every Believer for a significant ministry of excellence by helping them discover the gifts and talents God gave them.

- It is the dream of sending out hundreds of career missionaries, church workers, and pastors all around the world. It is also the dream of sending our members by the hundreds on short-term missions projects to every continent. It is the dream of establishing at least one "daughter church" every year.

- It is the dream of building a church campus that will enable us to:

    - Minister to the needs of our community.
    - Equip and serve our fellowship.
    - House a dynamic program for our children and teenagers.
    - Provide a "House of Prayer" for the Columbia area.
    - Establish a Christ-centered school for our children and others in the community.
    - Provide a ministry training center for those interested in vocational ministry.

    All of this will be designed to minister to the "total person"—spiritually, emotionally, physically, and socially.

This vision statement spoke to issues of: ethos—we would create an atmosphere of love, care, and acceptance; and evangelism—fulfilling the Great Commission would

become our "first love," both at home and abroad. We calculated a projected church attendance of 2,000 before space restraints would necessitate another significant restructuring. Discipleship, equipping, and release to ministry would become the norm for members of Christian Life Assembly. We would invest in the greater kingdom of God by making home and foreign missions a priority of church life. We promoted the concept of embracing the sacrifice necessary to construct a new worship facility that could house the Christian Life Assembly dream.

Though some goals were easily measurable while others were qualitative and difficult to report, the vision statement has provided a visual image of what we wanted the church to become. Articulation of vision has provided not only direction for ministry but also motivation for our members, and it has identified the uniqueness of our church to the community.

We created a secondary vision statement for elders (pastors and deacons) in 2005 titled "20/20 Vision." This play on words spoke of seeing clearly our target for the year 2020. In this fifteen-year plan we set goals for small group ministries, pastoral care models, missions involvement, stewardship services, and the Christian Life Institute, an educational arm of the church which includes daycare, a private school, home school support systems, and a ministry training institute. An aggressive church-planting model will see the addition of five satellite campuses of Christian Life Assembly throughout the greater Columbia area. We also designed preliminary plans for selection and integration of the next senior pastor at the main campus, and development of a pastor emeritus position.

Unlike the mission and core value statements, the vision statement must be an ever-maturing document. Bruce Allen, financial advisor for Injoy Stewardship Services, explains that vision must be clear, concise, and compelling.[13] The tool for evaluating our vision was found in Ken Hemphill's book *The Antioch Effect*.

> How will you know when you have God's vision for your church? There are at least nine characteristics of a God-sized vision:

1. *The vision originates with God*—True vision is not centered in people or pastors, but in God and His purpose for the church.

2. *God's vision will be centered in and supported by His Word*—God will not communicate a vision contrary to His own character and kingdom purpose.

3. *To bring a vision to reality, we must have supernatural empowering*—If you can achieve your vision through programs or human strategy devoid of God's power, it is not a God-sized vision.

4. *Vision from God will be grounded in the Great Commission*—[19]"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20 NIV

5. *Vision will lead the church to exalt Christ*—The church is the body and bride of Christ, not the possession of its members. Authentic vision will exalt Christ alone.

6. *Vision requires radical obedience*—It is a terrible affront to ask for vision from God and refuse to implement it. Many churches are lifeless and listless because they have refused to obey the commands of Christ.

7. *Vision leads to natural growth*—God is the author of church growth, and when the church is in proper relationship to Him, He will cause the increase. God will call the church to obedience and then add regularly to their number as He did in the first century church.

8. Vision *demands a willingness to change*—Change can be more easily implemented and accepted if it is connected to a vision and a strategy to fulfill the vision.

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[13] Bruce Allen, Injoy Stewardship Services, Campaign leadership team meeting, Capitol Stewardship Campaign, Columbia, South Carolina, 11 November 2004.

9. *Vision requires family unity*—Many churches lack family unity because they do not have a family dream. A well-presented vision can forge a congregation into a unified whole.[14]

Communication

The degree of success in this transformation has been inextricably linked to how well the mission, values, and vision are communicated to the congregation. Early attempts at communication were dismal for several reasons.

Pastors who "live in the vision" have unrealistic expectations of the congregation, including its lay leadership. Attempts to communicate were built around "landmark sermons," but those only served to introduce the concept to parishioners. Enthusiasm and agreement during the presentation were at high levels, but the message was largely forgotten in short order.

Analysis helped us understand that our church attendance is cyclical. Because of work schedules, travel, or lack of commitment, a message must be communicated for three consecutive Sundays before the majority of the congregation has heard the message even once. Even then, the level of retainment is low. We discovered through trial and error that at least seven components must be incorporated to keep mission, values, and vision before a congregation:

1. Sermons are the best points of introduction, but key concepts are best presented in a two- or three- part series that repeats foundational ideas and builds upon the premise.

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[14] Ken Hemphill, *The Antioch Effect: 8 Characteristics of Highly Effective Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 134–137.

2. Concepts are referred to as small parts of sermons on different subjects. These two-minute reminders have become some of the best refreshers of vision.
3. Pastors and congregational leaders aggressively seek to model the mission, value, and vision in full view of the Christian Life Assembly family.
4. After the sermons the concepts are re-presented in forms such as dramas, updates, reminders, and celebration of victories.
5. Key concepts must be taught to every age level in the church. Children, teens, career singles, young families, and senior adult groups have all been targeted with special appeals sensitive to each unique situation.
6. Visual aids such as video clips, banners, and posters keep the image alive in the hearts of the congregation. Because of continual growth new venues must be provided in which the new arrivals are taught the foundational principles. This is initially done in Partner in Ministry (membership) classes and special quarterly banquets.
7. Quality and creativity are required to communicate effectively, especially in light of the fact that communication is a never-ending assignment.

Surprisingly, effective communication of the vision, values and mission has been the greatest single challenge in this process.

Culture of Life: Mission, Values, and Vision Lived Out

The defining characteristic of our church in transition is that we promote a "culture of life." This quality of church life found definition upon review of membership applicants. Interview notes indicate the number-one reason people join Christian Life

Assembly is clearly identified as a sense that "everything is alive; there is always hope, always another chance." Primarily this is due to an awareness that the favor of the Lord is upon us. On the human level we have adapted ourselves to our core values with increasing success. We have also presented a visual church model for our congregation by studying the church at Antioch as described in the book of Acts. In order to better explain this culture of life I will cite examples using our core values and our New Testament church model, "*First at Antioch.*"

These examples trace not only a change in programs, but also a total paradigm shift. Programs were discontinued, modified, or carried forth on the basis of how well they served the vision and values. Mission is seen as broad enough to be true of any church, and anything done for the Kingdom of God is seen as good and profitable in some context, but not necessarily ours. As these changes began to occur in 2003, we actually experienced a decline for a few months while some our membership sought a more traditional church home. The church growth charts reviewed in the next chapter reveal that new growth outpaced the defections, and we continued to increase both in terms of attendance and income. Typical changes are modeled from our core values statement.

1. Biblical Authority

This emphasis did not represent a significant shift in our church life or teachings. As an Assemblies of God congregation, we already had embraced the concept of the scriptures as the infallible, inerrant Word of God. What we did find was an audience of young adults on the college campus who were searching for an absolute authority in their lives. Through the ministry of Chi Alpha (the campus ministries of the Assemblies of

God) and an aggressive singles ministry, we are discovering the challenge of establishing the proper role of scripture in post-Christian America.

A second emphasis has been in our young-adult population. These families accept the authority of scripture and are interested in how to make life work. Though we are primarily committed to an expositional approach to teaching God's Word, we have found a considerable audience for the Bible wrapped in "How-To" packages. This corresponds to Wagner's statement that we are seeing a decline in systematic Bible teaching in some of the new apostolic models.[15]

2. Intimacy with God

Christian Life has made a concerted attempt to ingrain two concepts into the heart of every individual. First, every child of God is called to intimacy with our Father through prayer, worship, and God's Word. There is practical teaching through sermons, prayer meetings, classes, and an annual prayer emphasis that provide practical instruction on the nuts-and-bolts issues of this discipline. From prayer guides to pastoral modeling of prayer types and forms, the members of Christian Life are encouraged as enthusiastically as possible to pursue this dynamic of our heritage. A foundational statement often repeated is "Some things happen when I pray, that do not happen when I do not pray. Therefore, if I do not pray, then something foundational in my life or the life of someone I love goes undone."[16]

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[15] Wagner, *Churchquake!,* 52.

[16] Dick Eastman, *Change the World School of Prayer,* video series tape 3 (Colorado Springs: CO, 1987).

The second concept is that a biblical church is to be known as a house of prayer for all nations.[17] Systematic prayer revolves around fourteen corporate prayer points that are constantly before the people in the form of banners hanging throughout the sanctuary.

These banners represent what we believe to be the prayer assignment the Holy Spirit has placed upon our hearts for continual intercession.

We pray systematically for:

a. *Our national, state and local leaders*—1 Timothy 2:1-3.

b. *The spiritually lost in our community*—we have participated in prayer walks, prayer journeys, and nights of intercession.

c. *Racial and denominational reconciliation*—as a multiracial congregation, we are attempting to model unity in a church that reflects the city demographics.

d. *The children of our community*—South Carolina ranked first in domestic abuse in 2004.[18]

e. *The families within our community*—for stable marriages and homes of honor.

f. *The schools within our community*—for safety and a Christ-honoring atmosphere.

g. *The city of Columbia*—that she will become a world-class city enjoying a reduction in crime and poverty.

h. *The pastoral staff of Christian Life.*

i. *The ministries of Christian Life.*

j. *Our missionaries*—those who serve at home and abroad.

k. *Spiritual renewal.*

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[17] Isaiah 56:7 and Mark 11:17.

[18] Leach, Lauren, "ETV Pulls No Punches in Depicting Trauma of Domestic Violence" Columbia (SC) *State Newspaper,* 25 October 2005, section D1.

l. *A restoration of signs and wonders*—a return to our Pentecostal heritage.

m. *Community churches and pastors in the area*—we are one of the charter churches of Mission Columbia, an inter-church organization committed to mutual prayer and integrated, systematic service to our community.

n. *The peace of Jerusalem*—in the spirit of Psalm 122:6 we pray for both Palestinians and Israelis.

3. God's Empowering Presence

As a pentecostal church, we have chosen to structure services and ministries around the concept of God's empowering presence. One of the earliest decisions had to do with "how pentecostal" we would be. Our congregation was a mix of evangelicals, classic pentecostals, and denominational Christians who were participants in the charismatic renewal, as well as those best defined as from "word of faith" churches. There has been a continual need to define and model what we consider proper protocol for pentecostal worship. Although the specifics of this dynamic are beyond the scope of this paper, we have been successful in partnering with nonpentecostal groups in service and outreach to our city.

4. Culturally Relevant Environments

Although Columbia is located in the "Bible Belt," it is a city that increasingly reflects a post-Christian America. This is due to an increasing foreign-student population, which has produced rising African, Hispanic, and Muslim communities. We have committed to establishing culturally relevant environments in four ways:

A. We have sponsored an Hispanic congregation, allowing use of our building until their property was secured, as well as providing financial

and ministry support. We have also established dialog with the Muslim community, but this has met very limited success.

B. We have adopted a more casual, contemporary style in our worship services, a very popular move that has been cited by new members as another appealing factor in our church.

C. We have allowed seeker-driven environments to be utilized by our singles, youth, and children's ministries. These groups have all increased in size by at least 120%.

D. We have targeted five communities or cultural/ethnic groups for the planting of satellite churches over the next ten years. When we reach our target goal of 2,000 at our present site, we will already be in the process of multiplication by establishing these satellite campuses throughout Columbia.

5. Relational Evangelism

As late as 1996, Christian Life had served as a training church for Evangelism Explosion International (E.E.), a ministry founded by Dr. D. James Kennedy. A decision was made to allow E.E. training to continue, but our emphasis would shift to relational evangelism. In this manner we minimized the Evangelism Explosion involvement and began to teach our congregation that most people who come to Christ do so in the context of friends and close relationships. This was not to minimize any attempts at evangelism but to reflect our passion that people, not programs, bring other people to Jesus. Evangelism began to be presented as a natural outflow of life instead of a Tuesday night visitation program. Bill Hybel's *Becoming a Contagious Christian* and *Becoming a*

Contagious Church became our primary evangelism-training tool.[19] According to our annual church ministries report, conversions have increased as a result of this new emphasis.

6. Authentic Community

This expression of Christian Life is being communicated on two fronts. First of all, we are teaching the principle that "we multiply by dividing." As our numbers increase it has become increasingly difficult for staff pastors to personally meet the needs of the congregation, and the Sunday morning service has ceased being the primary tool of instruction. This has necessitated an acceptance of small groups, manifested as Sunday School classes, interest groups, ministry teams, or service groups. On the level of small groups discipleship is at its best, and a structure for care and accountability is generated.

In late 2005 leadership approved a structure for reorganizing the service arm of our church. Until that time the structure looked like this: senior pastor, elders (10 men formerly called deacons), associate pastors (6 men), departmental leaders, then the congregation. In this setting there was inadequate congregational care. It was not possible for pastors or elders to keep up with demands. A new organizational structure was adopted that is being implemented in the spring and summer of 2006: senior pastor, board of elders (25 men consisting of pastors, general elders, governing elders, and a 3 man trustee board that conforms to state law), deacons (a new level of service in the church consisting of 50 couples who are responsible for pastoral care, assistance, and accountability within the remaining members of the congregation), and departmental leaders, all of whom assist the congregation in the carrying out of various ministries.

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[19] Bill Hybels, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan,1994) and *Becoming a Contagious Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

On another level we are developing authentic community by actively pursuing racial reconciliation within our community. It is our conviction that the normative life for the church is to reflect the demographics of the community.

Remembering the concerns of our initial task force, we assigned a pastor the portfolio of creating in Christian Life Assembly a model of racial harmony. This could not be a forced issue, or many in the congregation and community would have perceived it as something artificial. Under the leadership of the Lord we have hired our first African American pastor, and we have also made sure that our elder and leadership teams represent the dynamics of our community.

Of particular value was *High Impact African-American Churches* by George Barna and Harry Jackson. The authors do an excellent job of framing the concepts of family, community, worship, faith, stewardship, and service that have been strengths of the African American churches in America. The book also assisted me in defining expectations concerning my role as a Caucasian pastor to several hundred African American parishioners.[20]

We have scheduled joint services with the Church of God in Christ and with the African American congregation from whom we purchased our first building. A spiritual bond had existed with that congregation, as our first church building, acquired in 1936, was the church for slaves of people who attended First Baptist Church in the years leading up to the Civil War.[21]

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[20] George Barna and Harry R. Jackson, *High Impact African-American Churches* (Ventura,CA: Regal Books,2004), 46–63.

[21] Steven Brown, former pastor of Christian Life Assembly 1976 to 1994, regarding information for title document search during building campaign leadership meeting, 2 May 2004.

7. Partners in Ministry and 8. Intentional Apprenticing

With the exception of those who have health issues, who are in personal crisis, or who are on sabbatical, every member of Christian Life Assembly is strongly encouraged to find a place of ministry within the church family. This eliminated those who had joined merely to be served, to obtain voting rights, or to receive benevolence benefits. We realize that our membership requirements are strenuous, but our goal was to move away from congregational government and the trend in many churches for members to act as shareholders, each with a vote in the matters of business. Our conviction is that the pastor leads the church. Just as mature parents rule a home even though outnumbered by children, necessity dictates that authority belongs to those who are mature and who have responsibility for the family.

Membership is required for release to ministry, and all members working with minors must submit to background checks as security measures. Required membership classes, the administration of a ministry gifts test, a pastoral interview, elder approval, and ministry assignment are all part of the Partners in Ministry process. In addition Partners in Ministry are asked to sign both a membership and a ministry covenant.[22]

The Partners in Ministry constitute our pool from which workers are assigned and future leaders emerge. In addition, each member is being trained in how to raise up apprentice ministers within their skill areas. This ensures a team of workers in future church plants as well as within subsequent generations at Christian Life Assembly. Each departmental leader, teacher, elder, and pastor is essentially expected to train someone either to replace them or to plant in new churches.

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[22] Copies of membership and ministry covenants in appendix 4 and 5.

9. Pastors who are Servant Leaders

Perhaps the most critical change to our structure revolves around the expression of pastoral leadership. My experience has been that pastors are generally treated as employees of the church. Peter Wagner identifies traditional assumptions concerning the pastor's role: [23]

a. As employees, pastors are paid a salary to minister. The implication of this is that the pastor is hired to do the work of the church.

b. Pastors come and pastors go. Mainline denominations generally average pastoral tenures of less than five years.

c. Pastors are enablers. The pastor's job is seen as helping the people accomplish what they desire.

d. Pastors are "medicine men." This is the term Lyle Schaller uses to contrast the "medicine man" from the "tribal chief."[24] The medicine man does the religious things, while the tribal chief is the real leader.

e. Pastors are subject to performance reviews. Because pastors are employees, the church sees itself as responsible to hire, fire and supervise. This can be used as an underlying threat that discourages risk-taking and innovative pastoral leadership.

The leadership team of Christian Life has introduced bylaw and structural changes that give life to certain basic assumptions concerning pastoral leadership.[25]

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[23] Wagner, *Churchquake!,* 82-84.

[24] Lyle Schaller, *Twenty-one Bridges to the Twenty-first Century* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 1994), 137.

[25] Stephen Chitty, "Fervent in Spirit; Diligent in Business," (church document, Christian Life Assembly, Columbia, South Carolina, 2005).

1. *The pastor is the leader and primary communicator of the church's mission, value, and vision.* Simply stated, the pastoral mission is to preach, pray, and hear from God. In Paul Borden's model of church leadership the pastor is seen as the tribal chief who climbs into a tree in order to secure the best possible view of the surrounding terrain. From this position of oversight he directs the villagers and points out where the best land for farming, grazing, and so forth can be found. At the base of the tree are the tribal elders with spears in hand. Their job is to free the chief to remain in the tree and give oversight. He will not come down for inconsequential matters or maintenance. They reinforce the chief's orders (vision, values, and mission) and keep the villagers on task.[26] While clear provision is made within the bylaws for discipline or dismissal of the pastor by the governing elders, the pastor is clearly seen as the leader and chief decision maker of the church.
2. *The pastor is expected to lead strongly and to avoid management issues.* The pastor should not be involved in micromanagement of administrative affairs. Though he retains ultimate veto-power, the pastor trusts staff to manage the ministry of the congregation. Borden describes it in this way:

> The pastor is to lead the church by being the primary vision caster. The administrative board governs the church. The staff manages the ministry, while the people do the ministry itself. That is the formula for success.[27]

At Christian Life Assembly we have undergone three bylaw revisions in order to align ourselves with these principles of management and leadership:

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[26] Paul Borden, Leadership Meeting (South Carolina Assemblies of God Retreat, Hilton Head, South Carolina), written notes, 19-20 January, 2006.

[27] Ibid.

a. The pastor leads and is responsible for mission, values, and vision.

b. The administrative board (governing elders) provides accountability and protection for the pastor concerning financial integrity, legal protection, and doctrinal orthodoxy.

3. The church staff (office and pastoral personnel) manages the work of the ministry.

4. The congregation carries out the work of the ministry.

5. *The pastor must be accepted by the congregation in his role as delegator and overseer*. While only 235 of the original 460 in attendance in 1994 have remained, those who have remained, along with the growing church family, accept the concept that ministry at Christian Life Assembly is a team effort. With the passing of time and the excellence of the associate pastor staff the congregation is learning to allow care to proceed from varying sources within the church family.

6. *The pastor is responsible for a solid, competent pastoral team.* Our idea has been to put together a staff of excellent attitude and loyalty, and to learn, serve, and grow old together. While we remember the prerogatives of the Lord of the Harvest, the staff of Christian Life Assembly is hired with the expectation of a lifelong commitment.

7. *Pastors are called for an indefinite term.* A shepherd is intensely connected with his sheep. Multiple sources and studies confirm the value of a long pastoral tenure. Peter Wagner cites important benefits of such policy.

> The rather radical departure from traditional concepts of pastoral tenure carries *two important implications* and *two other interesting implications:* The first important implication is that by doing this, new apostolic churches are incorporating a tested principle of church growth. Growing

> churches are characterized by pastors who have longer tenures than they have in typical plateaued or declining churches. This is one of the reasons new apostolic churches are growing faster than others across the board. The second important implication is territorial commitment, which relates to spiritual authority.
>
> In his outstanding book *Commitment to Conquer* (Chosen Books), Bob Beckett makes a persuasive case that pastoral authority increases in proportion to the pastor's to the community as well as the church. Virtually every conscientious pastor is committed to the church he serves. Few and far between are those pastors who are equally committed to the community in which their church is located. The first interesting implication of a lifetime call is that insiders and outsiders alike frequently know new apostolic churches by the pastor's name. The second interesting application is that new apostolic churches are often classic mom and pop outfits. The pastor's spouse is frequently ordained and serves as co pastor or has a similar title.[28]

Concerning pastoral tenure, Ken Hemphill notes: "Moses stayed with the people because he had a heart for them. He transmitted that dream to the next generation, and in the process he focused on God and allowed Him to build character in the people."[29] Thom Rainer sees this trend as well:

> The biblical covenant between God and his people is the basis for covenantal relationships between Christians. . . . Instead of seeing each church as a rung on the ladder to bigger fields and greener pastures, the church will be a place where the pastor can give of himself as long as God intends him to stay there. As a consequence, pastoral tenure will increase in the years ahead. Many pastors will not move unless God's voice is clearly heard to do so. Lifetime pastorates still may not be the norm. Society is so different from 150 years ago that non-lifetime pastorates may still be in the will of God. But ten, twenty, and even thirty-year tenures will become more common.[30]

8. *Pastors choose their successors*. Pastoral searches have only occurred twice in 70 years at Christian Life Assembly. The atmosphere associated with a pastoral

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[28] Wagner, *Churchquake!,* 93–94.

[29] Hemphill, 144–145.

[30] Rainer, Breakout Churches, 117.

search has led us to believe that a planned, systematic integration of a preselected pastor minimizes trauma to the church and also ensures a continuation of the mission and values. Though we are obviously at the Lord's mercy concerning any future plans, our hope is for a process of selection and integration to begin in about 15 years, I assume pastor emeritus status for the 6 planned Christian Life Assembly congregations.

As we have endeavored to develop a community of believers based on our mission, values, and vision, we have discovered a practical model that we feel puts these elements together. Our *First at Antioch: 10 Characteristics of a New Testament Church* has given us greater commitment to our vision as we study this great church in the Book of Acts. The series has been presented annually for the last three years. The concept for the model is based loosely on Ken Hemphill's work in the Broadman and Holman Development Book series, *The Antioch Effect: Eight Characteristics of Highly Effective Churches*. By modifying and adapting the skeletal concept of Hemphill's book to our unique distinctives we were able to point to scripture and read about a church that traveled this path before. In as many venues as possible we remind our people that we have the spiritual DNA of the Church at Antioch.

First At Antioch:
Ten Characteristics of Christianity's Greatest First-Century Church

1. A Church Who Hears the Voice of the Spirit (Acts 13:2)—Just as Antioch heard the voice of the Holy Spirit, so do we.

2. A Church That Modeled the Grace of the Lord (Acts 11:21–24)—Just as Antioch produced the fruit of God's presence, so do we.

3. A Church With Supernatural Power (Acts 11:21–30)—Just as Antioch operated in the power of the Holy Spirit, so do we.

4. A Church With Spirit-Filled Worship (Acts 13:1–3)—Just as Antioch made ministering to the Lord its priority, so do we.

5. A Church With Prayer as the Priority (Acts 13:1–3—Just as Antioch walked in the power of prayer, so do we.

6. A Church That is a Family (Galatians 2:11–16)—Just as Antioch embraced all cultures and races, so do we.

7. A Church With Leaders Who are Servants (Acts 11:21–30)—Just as Antioch was led by servants of integrity, passion, and vision, so are we.

8. A Church That Matured Disciples (Acts 11:25–26)—Just as Antioch equipped, trained, and released its family to ministry, so do we.

9. A Church that Loved the Lost (Acts 11:24, 26)—Just as Antioch witnessed and rejoiced in the coming of people to the Lord, so do we.

10. A Church With a Common Vision—Just as Antioch was devoted to its mission, values, and vision, so are we.

With this visual image before us it has been easier to communicate what our preferred future looks like.

Chronology

In regard to the chronology of our transformation, it is important to note that the process has not been as smooth as the paper might imply. There was opposition, and there were unwilling leaders, disgruntled members, and staff members who lacked the vision to embrace our dream. We had several false starts on many initiatives, and we often retreated in order to advance later. Before we adopted the *First at Antioch* model, I tried two approaches, one utilizing the Book of Nehemiah and one tracing Israel from bondage in Egypt to fulfillment in the Promised Land. Neither of these models captured the hearts of our people.

We planned this as a five-year project, and are pleased to have successfully turned the heart of the church and aligned structures with our values. Not all goals have been met within this time span, but we must remember the process of transformation has occurred amidst the ongoing work of a growing church. Several things occurring continuously through the five-year period has been a steadfast preaching of these themes, the commitment of lay leaders, a constant revisionary eye on policies and procedures, and a base of prayer that has moved us forward on our knees.

The congregation exhibited considerable patience as we occasionally abandoned a course of action after realizing we had not prepared adequately or executed with excellence. It should also be noted that the Leadership Team and key church members felt powerfully compelled that this was the heart of God for us. Such radical systemic change is not advised without a sense of congregational support and divine appointment. An approximate chronology of this project is as follows:

1994–2000 Events described in chapter one are facilitators of review and change.

2001 January: A task force is established to discuss the future of Christian Life Assembly.

June: The final report of the task force is submitted to pastors.

August: Pastoral recommendations are submitted to the board of deacons.

September: A building committee is given the task of recommending a course of action for future facilities expansion. The $240,000 purchase of 1.9 acres adjoining the church is deemed as essential for site expansion.

November: Our mission statement is accepted by the leadership team.

2002 January: Our mission statement is presented to the congregation.

February–March: The initial presentation of *First at Antioch* is made.

April–June: Two sets of changes in the constitution and bylaws facilitate structural change.

July: Work begins on core values. The first set is abandoned as being too vague.

August–October: Pastors prepare the Christian Life Assembly vision statement.

September: We abandoned relocation as an option, and commit to the property we already own. This necessitate a $435,000 project to drain a small lake, fill the lakebed, and prepare the ground for a new worship facility.

November: The Leadership Team commits to the construction of a new worship facility and to the Christian Life vision statement.

2003 January–February: The second presentation of *First at Antioch* is made.

March: Introduction of new building concept to the congregation.

April: The Christian Life Assembly vision is introduced to the congregation. Discussion begins with Terry Carter of the South Carolina District of the Assemblies of God about the concept of planting satellite churches in Columbia instead of making traditional district church plants.

May: The office of Injoy Stewardship Services is hired to help us raise

capitol funds for our new building. The program is called *Building To Touch Lives,* and will produce in 2004 almost $2.7 million dollars in pledges over a three-year period. The campaign promotion will stretch from November 2003 until May 2004.

2004 May–June: Plans for new building are created.

May: Third constitution and bylaw revision begins. *Building To Touch Lives* culminates with a promotional event.

September: Work on core values resumes.

2005 February–April: Initial presentation of core values is made.

May: Construction begins on the new $3.5 million facility.

April–November: New procedures concerning accounting, management, and pastoral responsibilities are finalized.

November: The *20/20 Vision* leadership team is accepted.

2006 (projected) January–March: Third annual presentation of *First at Antioch* is made.

March–June: Final selection, training, and introduction of new deacon ministry teams is fulfilled.

April: Presentation of final restructuring of church bylaws under the direction of the attorney is made to the congregation.

June: Scheduled completion of the new worship facility is completed.

Continuation: Is Success in this Project Measurable and Reproducible?

Our church motto is *Building Godly Generations*. Therefore, it is critical that our transformation be both measurable and reproducible. The final chapter will discuss

specifics of measurability. The model must be reproducible to our next generation of leadership at Christian Life Assembly and must also be reproducible as a model for other churches within our denomination.

Regarding our own church, *Next Generation Leader* training is being formed that is a mentoring program designed for those interested in eventually serving the church in leadership positions. Similar programs are in place in our *Oneighty* youth ministry and our *KidzLife* children's ministry. Keeping the mission, values, and vision at the forefront is what drives our ministry activities.

We have also felt that our model of transformation could be reproduced in other churches. Two events encouraged us to generate a church model that could be offered to other fellowships.

First, as Christian Life Assembly worked its way through this process, I served as a member of the South Carolina District transformation team, headed by Superintendent Steve Brown and church consultant Dr. Pat Fiore. In this eighteen-month process plans were developed to re-create the South Carolina District of the Assemblies of God into a church-centered entity. Superintendent Brown and this team identified several factors. First of all, the state fellowship has been in decline.

> The South Carolina District has currently entered its sixty-third year of existence. Over these years, eleven superintendents had an opportunity to provide leadership. The district plateaued several years ago and is currently in a progressive decline having experienced a net loss of nearly twenty churches over the past twelve years. Attrition continues as many of our older congregations continue to try to hold on to the past expecting that tomorrow will somehow become yesterday. Many of our pastors simply don't know what to do to reclaim the health and spiritual vitality of their churches.[31]

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[31] Steve Brown, Integrative Paper, (M.A. thesis, Southeastern University, Lakeland, FL, 2005), 1.

Another concern was that the ineffectiveness of many district-initiated programs was being ignored by the fellowship of churches.

> One of my primary concerns is to raise our district's consciousness of vital kingdom issues and move away from repeating programs that do not meet needs. There are too many Assemblies of God congregations across South Carolina led by good, sincere men of God who have little or no awareness of either purpose or plan. Nationwide, seven more churches close for every one that is planted. In the past ten years, there has been a nine and one half percent decrease in Pentecostal church attendance. Eighty five percent of Assemblies of God churches are plateaued or in decline. . . . My long-term goal is to produce a sturdy, Spirit-empowered and increasingly large leadership base to assure future district growth. I am convinced that the more passionate leaders that I can train to replicate themselves, the more opportunities there will be to develop healthy, growing congregations.[32]

Another catalyst for change was the growing perception that the district office would assume an adversarial posture in matters of local church sovereignty and property rights. This perception was confirmed by survey results indicating that nearly half of South Carolina pastors were concerned about issues of property reversion and district intervention in local government.

Steve Brown and Pat Fiore assembled a team of pastors and district leaders from across South Carolina to achieve the following goals:

> 1. To restructure district governing documents in order to place responsibility for growth into the hands of local congregations instead of the state offices.
> 2. To create a permission-giving environment for pastors with minimal denominational input or control.
> 3. To create a new atmosphere of cooperation and mutual support between state offices and local churches.
> 4. To create governance that releases the district superintendent to begin mentoring and equipping of pastors as opposed to mere administrative supervision.
> 5. To raise up mentoring pastors and churches that would serve as models to younger ministers.
> 6. To raise up churches that would model facilitation of change in governance, mission, values, and vision.

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[32] Ibid., 1.

7. To bring clarity to the mission, values, and vision of the South Carolina Assemblies of God.[33]

The second factor involved the results of a nationwide survey sent to Assemblies of God ministers and designed to indicate the subgroup from South Carolina. This survey was an attempt to (1) identify perceptions about church government, especially on the local church level, and (2) determine areas to target for change. My goal was not to create dissent or generate controversy but simply to identify the broad perceptions concerning church government throughout the Assemblies of God in America in general, and South Carolina in particular. Approximately 1627 surveys were sent throughout the nation. Out of the 470 surveys returned only 273 indicated the size of their congregation, as needed for the statistical analysis.[34] Several distinct trends seem to emerge.

Concerning local church government, two-thirds of respondents felt that church decision making should be a shared process by pastor and board, with the board limited to an advisory level. Additional comments on the responses indicated that the shared process is probably embraced to avoid the appearance of dictatorial rule by a pastor or to safeguard his integrity. Two-thirds of respondents said that church boards had been a helpful dynamic in their churches, but several dozen respondents indicated by comment that this was true only after considerable growth, the passing of time, or when governmental revisions were made to enhance the leadership of the pastor.

Concerning district church government, three-fourths of respondents felt that district offices were supportive of their local church government structures, but only half felt that the district was supportive of pastoral leadership during times of congregational

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[33] Pat Fiore, South Carolina District Transformation Manual, (Columbia, SC, 2006), 1–7.

[34] Results of the survey are included in appendix 8 and 9.

conflict. Respondents were divided in regard to concerns over district intervention in the sovereignty of local churches. Twenty-five percent agreed that they were concerned about district intervention, while 18% were not sure. Fifty-seven percent disagreed. In South Carolina, however, 48% expressed concern about district intervention.

Concerning national church government, 42% of respondents indicated that the governmental structure of the national office was helpful to their ministry, while 33% disagreed and 25% were not sure. An interesting observation on this point is that in churches with over 500 in attendance, 41% agreed, 41% disagreed, with 18% being uncertain. Forty-eight percent believe that the Assemblies of God has remained true to its original vision, while 31% disagreed and 21% were unsure.

Concerning national and district church government: 52% of respondents did not believe that district or national councils should have property claims over local churches. While 27% expressed no opinion, 21% felt that the property reversion clauses were acceptable. 61% of those responding believed each local assembly should have the right to disassociate themselves from national or district affiliation in certain cases, 9% expressed no opinion, and 21% disagreed. Only 17% disagreed that a governmental restructure would be inappropriate for district and national offices, with 53% desirous of change and 29% undecided.

While acknowledging possible deficiencies and unasked questions that may taint any survey, I feel the following conclusions are noteworthy or at least arguable. While two-thirds of respondents replied that local decision making should be a shared process by pastor and board, the comment section of the survey, phone calls, and personal correspondence revealed a long history of congregational abuses toward pastors that had

resulted in the pastor's dismissal or resignation from their churches. Many respondents, though at peace in present ministries, wrote as battle-scarred veterans of past congregational power plays.

Although the majority did not fear district intervention, the numbers that did, especially in South Carolina, should be a cause for concern to Assemblies of God leadership. At some point in time a disconnect has occurred, especially on the district-to-local-church level.

There seems to be little meaningful connection between the local church and the national office. Though several commented that this has improved in recent years, it appears from the survey that most find the national office unhelpful, fear it has strayed from its original purpose, and feel that restructuring on both national and district levels is probably advisable.

Property reversion issues are a potential problem for the Assemblies of God. Pastors and local congregations feel that they have lost the right to disassociate, if necessary, from this voluntary cooperative fellowship.

At the request of the South Carolina district officials, we have begun preliminary preparations to offer the Christian Life Assembly model as a training tool to be made available to the churches of South Carolina that desire similar transformation. While not every church will seek to embrace a Christian Life Assembly model, district roundtable meetings and project survey results, as earlier discussed, have indicated an interest by a growing number of churches who desire to shift toward an empowered-pastoral-leadership model, thereby leading to a minimization of the traditional, congregational model of the Assemblies of God.

Nearly 70% of the churches in South Carolina are district-affiliated churches, which means the district officers have significant administrative control.[35] This means that the legal (bylaw) shift, endorsed by the district, would be a relatively easy task. The model would offer on-site consultation services and teaching resources which would assist the transformation process on the levels of local church morale, change dynamics, and ministry philosophy.

[35] Steven Brown, South Carolina District Superintendent, district vision meeting, 17 May (Greenville Assemblies of God, Greenville, SC, 2005).

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

Several factors must be employed to determine the success of this project, some of which are difficult to assess. The project has several demonstrable results, such as attendance, ministry results, finances, and structural change. Others, such as morale, momentum, the atmosphere of the church in general, and that of worship services in particular, are more difficult to quantify. Some factors can be evaluated only with the passing of time, even of generations. Therefore, evaluation will be assessed in terms of preparation, measurable factors, subjective factors, and points for future evaluation.

Preparation

I should begin by citing both negative and positive observations concerning the project. On a positive note, the project was my passion. It was not initially begun as a seminary project. It had the advantage of promoting change because it had become a spiritual passion and ecclesiastical necessity for key leaders of Christian Life Assembly and for myself. Though it was designed as a five-year plan, such transformation would not have flowed so smoothly without the preceding five years of adjustment outlined in chapter one. In that sense, this has really been a ten-year project. In another sense, it has been a thirty-year project, because without the experience, positive and negative, of previous pastorates, I would not have been prepared for these changes myself. I point this

out because younger pastors need to realize that change in an established church is much more difficult than in a new church plant. My advice to many young pastors is that they consider planting a church so that they can determine the spiritual DNA of the congregation from the onset.

On the negative side, it should be noted that nearly 50% of the congregation I inherited is no longer with the church. Although many of that number moved to other cities, a significant number left to join other congregations over concerns about style, vision, and values. In other words, church transformation has been costly, though certainly well worth the effort.

Any pastor must be aware of certain congregational dynamics when considering transformation. First, what is the heart of your leadership team? Secondly, is the heart of the congregation willing to follow pastoral leadership into uncharted waters? If either group is not ready, what are the prospects of transforming these hearts to the pastoral vision? Has the pastor spent enough time at the church to earn the loyalty and credibility necessary to endure the tense process of change? These are very practical issues based on the advice of Jesus Himself:

> Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, This fellow began to build and was not able to finish. Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.[1]

The risks of this type of change are high. As a first order of business, a wise pastor will count the cost for himself, his family, and the congregation.

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[1] Luke 14:28–33 NIV.

There was also the danger of substituting what we thought a church *should be* for what we eventually sensed was God's *unique plan* for us. We struggled early on to articulate our vision. It became obvious after months of meeting and several aborted documents that we could not possibly become everything to every group in Columbia. It became necessary to establish priorities in order to successfully weed out *good* ministries in order to embrace the *best* ministries. With patience for each other and for the process, we gradually began to give form on paper to what God had put in our hearts.

Measurable Factors

The most obvious indicator of success is the increase in attendance. When the process began, we were just over 700 in Sunday attendance. We now average over 1100 and the growth rate has slowed only because we have no place to seat new attendees, though we have added a third service at 1:00 P.M. The late hour has attracted only about 70–80 people per service. This problem should be alleviated when our new worship center is completed in June. In similar fashion, the Oneighty youth service has increased from an attendance of 47 to an average attendance of 104, and children's ministry attendance has almost doubled in the five-year span. The Wednesday night pastoral lead Bible study has increased from 83 to over 125 in the main service. Total Wednesday night attendance is around 450.

Another indicator of success in demonstrated by our financial increase. Three significant trends are identifiable.

1. In the five years from 2001–2005, total giving increased from just over $900,000 to over $1,500,000. This number does not include loans or proceeds of any type.

2. The *Building to Touch Lives* campaign has generated over $2,500,000 in pledges, about 35% of which has been received. Our initial fears were that the building campaign would reduce general-fund giving, but the indication is that general-fund giving increased by nearly 12% during the time of the campaign.
3. Our World Ministries Giving (missions) increased from $36,000 in 1994 to $320,000 in 2005.

These trends lead us to believe that the congregation is continually embracing the vision. Each Sunday has a different offering emphasis (general fund, missions, Compassion Carolina, benevolence, and Building to Touch Lives), and the emphasis is a gentle reminder to the people of our Christian Life Assembly vision.

The adoption of the concept of the new $3.5 million worship center is also an indicator of success. The building program was promoted with the idea that:

> We are not building for ourselves. We aren't giving one dollar to increase our comfort. We are making Columbia a hard place to go to hell from. Every seat we buy, every parking place we construct represents someone else that will not go to hell, because we are here to *Build Godly Generations*.[2]

Another reason for optimism is the state of auxiliary ministries. Not only is the worship attendance increasing, but also numbers are on the rise for youth, children, Sunday School, Royal Rangers, Missionettes, and Singles. In many of these ministries there is adequate volunteer staffing for the first time in the church's history.

Finally, structural changes (governmental and procedural) have been changed to accommodate this model. The final bylaw revision is scheduled for adoption in April of 2006.

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[2] Stephen Chitty, Leadership Meeting, written notes from presentation on 7 March 2004.

One concern is that we have not been able to successfully integrate most of our people into a small-group setting. As of this writing, about 32% are involved in some type of group. According to some church analysts, it is exceptional for a church to be above 35% in involvement,[3] so we may not be as far off as it seems. The emphasis, however, continues to be that everyone needs small-group environment, as discussed under the section concerning *Authentic Community.*

Subjective Factors

Morale, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Every indication is that enthusiasm is high across the board on both leadership and congregational levels. A fresh flow of new members keeps the excitement high and the vision before us. The atmosphere in our services has been one of excellence in music, fellowship, and communication. The negative dynamic we have is that of not always doing a satisfactory job of keeping the mission, value, and vision before the congregation. It is as though the pastors have been afraid of driving people away with an overemphasis, but in recent days, this has been repackaged as enthusiasm to be a part of "the greatest church on planet earth."

As for me, I truly feel like I was born to pastor the city of Columbia, South Carolina. Everything in my life, from my perception, has pointed to ministry at Christian Life Assembly. I have no greater ambition, nor do any of our present pastoral staff members (beyond the hopes of establishing one of our satellite churches). The elders (formerly deacons) are also accepting more responsibility for the communication of our

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[3] Ted Haggard, "Life-Giving Church" (presentation made at the New Life Church Growth Clinic on 8 June 1997), New Life Church, Colorado Springs, CO.

dream. The new Deacon Training Camp that begins in the summer of 2006 will generate another level of vision casters that will be operating on the small-group level.

Points for Future Evaluation

Obviously, our project is just beginning to enter the stage of fruit bearing. While most indicators point to probable success and continued growth, some factors can be fully evaluated only with ample passing of time.

Critical Issues

1. The first concern is pastor based. Does the present senior pastor have the makeup for a long-term pastoral experience? My pastoral tenure has been an average of two years as a youth and childrens pastor, and an average just under four years as senior pastor of four other congregations. At the date of this writing, I have served Christian Life Assembly for over eleven years. I personally feel that each of the preceding pastorates was part of training and equipping for a greater work, which I feel will mature in Columbia. My track record leaves this open for review.
2. The second concern is whether increasing cultural change will render our vision so different that another new wineskin is required. Barna suggests that culture is reinventing itself as quickly as every three years and that the church may not have the coping skills to keep up.[4] The path, he says, is into uncharted territory.

> Our research shows that local churches have virtually no influence in our culture. The seven dominant spheres of influence are movies, music, television, books, the Internet, law and family. The second tier of influencers is comprised of entities such as schools, peers, newspaper,

[4] Barna, *Revolution,* 101–110.

> radio and businesses. The local church appears to be among the entities that have little or no influence upon society.[5]

The cultural changes we see by 2020 will be no less intimidating as the changes we have negotiated through 2005. Will we be up to the change? To paraphrase Elijah, "Are we better than our fathers?"[6] Will we adjust better within our system than our predecessors did in theirs? Time will tell.

3. It is vital that a constant supply of new-generation leaders be infused into the operations and ministries of Christian Life Assembly. In 1994 the average age of our congregation was nearly 40. Now it is 32 years. The church is getting younger, but the leadership is getting older. The average age of board members in 1994 was 36. In 2005 it is 47 years. Barna notes a trend we are mindful of,

> As a result of the passing of the torch, Busters (those born from 1965–1983) and Mosaics (those born from 1984 to 2002) are altering the ways in which people relate to each other, the types of outcomes deemed desirable, the procedures used to achieve meaningful results, the values and beliefs that underlie critical decisions, and the role of technology in our lives. These same transitions are radically affecting how people perceive and practice their faith.[7]

Our goal is for present leaders to stay as "contemporary" as possible, without allowing ourselves to believe we truly understand subsequent generations. Successful transition will occur to the extent that we train our next-generation leaders and release them into leadership roles. We must remain a "people in process."

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[5] Ibid., 118.

[6] 1 Kings 19:4.

[7] Barna, *Revolution,* 42.

4. Some long-term goals, such as the establishing of satellite churches and our method of pastoral succession, are new concepts to Assemblies of God congregations. We realize that adaptations will occur along the way, but we believe that we have processed and identified a model to enable us to transcend cultures and even time.

In retrospect, I believe we could have achieved more in a shorter period of time if we had been able to develop from the beginning a comprehensive plan which was more concise in its action steps. Instead, we went from phase to phase in piecemeal fashion, almost stumbling onto some principles that proved significant. While this document outlines a comprehensive, yet adaptable approach to transition, we had no such document to follow. Like the church in Antioch, we acknowledge with thanksgiving that "the grace of the Lord was with us."[8]

[8] Acts 11:21 NIV.

APPENDIX 1

ROLES AND OFFICES OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

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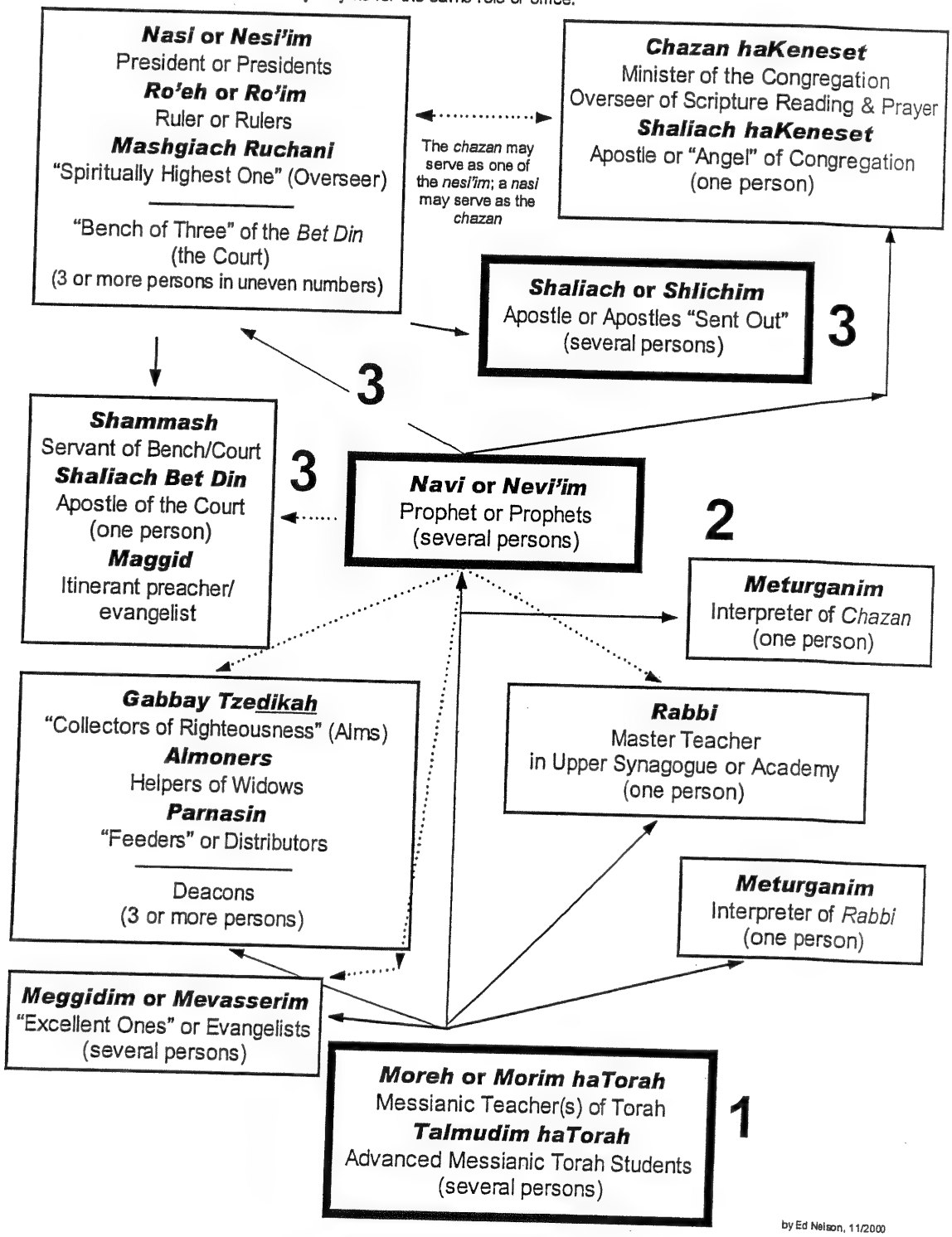
Bellwether INTERNATIONAL

Roles & Offices of the First Century Church

Please note that *solid* lines indicate role or office must follow the direct, unbroken line to be qualified. *Dotted* lines indicate role or office may be filled by a prophet, but always by a Torah teacher or advanced student. **Bold boxes** show that apostles (*shlichim*) come from prophets (*nevi'im*) and prophets from Torah teachers (*morim haTorah*), in that order. Every role requires at minimum an advanced Torah student of the Lord Jesus' Teaching. All, except students, are elders. Also note that boxes contain synonyms for the same role or office.



by Ed Nelson, 11/2000

APPENDIX 2

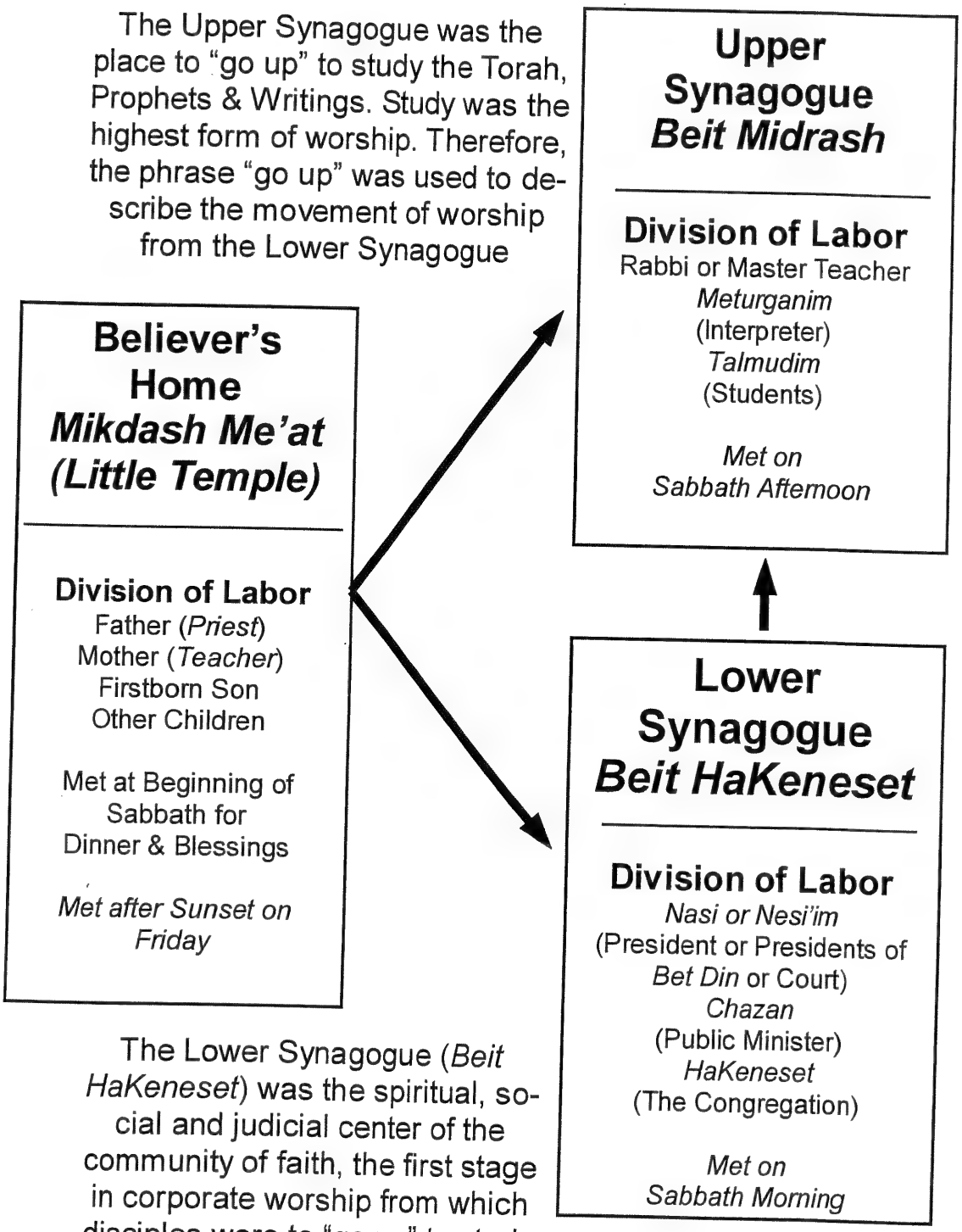
THE FIRST CENTURY SYNAGOGUE OR CHURCH—
THE EXTENSION OF THE HOME

(by Dr. Ed Nelson, reprinted by permission)

Bellwether INTERNATIONAL

The First Century Synagogue or Church — The Extension of the Home

The Upper Synagogue was the place to "go up" to study the Torah, Prophets & Writings. Study was the highest form of worship. Therefore, the phrase "go up" was used to describe the movement of worship from the Lower Synagogue



The Lower Synagogue (*Beit HaKeneset*) was the spiritual, social and judicial center of the community of faith, the first stage in corporate worship from which disciples were to "go up" to study

by Ed Nelson 11/2000

APPENDIX 3

FIRST CENTURY CHURCH ORDER AND STRUCTURE

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First Century Church Order and Structure
by Ed Nelson

During the first century, church order and organization was the same as the synagogue at the time of Jesus and the early apostles. They were identical in concept for at least one to two hundred years or more after the resurrection of our Lord.

By AD 90, synagogues hostile to the gospel changed their liturgy to deny that Jesus was Lord, moving away somewhat from the normative synagogue during Jesus' time sixty years earlier. This forced Jewish believers within those synagogues to form new synagogues where Messiah was worshiped as Lord. But the overall order and organization remained essentially the same. The synagogue was to be a place that focused on the Messiah through the study of the Scriptures and its roles of leadership and activity.

After the resurrection of our Lord, believers regularly met on the Sabbath in "houses of study" and in the early evening after the Sabbath ended at sunset. They met for prayer, breaking of bread and the apostles' teaching. For them, this was actually Sunday, not Saturday night, because they used the Jewish calendar. The Jewish day begins at sunset. When the Roman calendar was imposed on the church in the fourth century, Sundays began at midnight instead of sunset. The loss of the Jewish calendar had a profound effect on the church.

Sometimes at the Sunday meeting (on Saturday night to Gentiles) they had what was known as the "love-feast." It was a time when a banquet table was served, followed by the "Thanksgiving" or Eucharist. The evening included Bible study and the apostles' teachings about Messiah. There was no New Testament at this time, though many documents written by apostles and others were used.

Whatever the synagogue, so was the church. It's structure and form was understood to reveal the Messiah and his relationship to his people. This validated the synagogue as the preferred corporate institution for the worship of the Lord Jesus. Everything in it pointed to the Messiah, the Living Torah.

Differences Between Hostile Synagogues and Friendly Synagogues. Many Gentile believers are preconditioned by revisionist history to think that all synagogues were hostile to the message of Jesus and the Twelve. This was not true. By AD 70, about one-third of Jerusalem's population were believers in Jesus as Messiah.

However, many Jewish leaders did not believe in the Messiah. Of them many were hostile. Through them was an increased hostility towards the Jewish "sect of the Nazarenes" (*Nazoraioi*) as Christians were called. Persecution occasionally occurred.

Yet many synagogues were friendly and receptive to the gospel of our Lord Jesus, both in Jerusalem and in those scattered among the Gentiles.

The chief differences between hostile synagogues and Messiah-friendly synagogues were four:

1. Friendly synagogues received the message that the risen Lord Jesus was the Messiah; hostile synagogues refuted the message.
2. Friendly synagogues recognized that, with the coming of the Messiah, prophecy was restored; hostile synagogues taught that prophecy ended with Malachi.
3. Friendly synagogues embraced the gifts of the Holy Spirit as a sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God through Jesus the Messiah; hostile synagogues did not exercise gifts of the Holy Spirit.
4. Friendly synagogues did not change the *Amidah* (the Benedictions repeated at every synagogue meeting) but kept in intact; hostile synagogues added a benediction in or

about AD 90 condemning the sect of the Nazarene as heresy, forcing true believers to recant or leave.

Qualifications for Leadership

The early apostles set in place clear instructions to help the churches become better disciples and avoid false teachers and false prophets. We will touch on a few general qualifications for leaders of the church.

Not a Novice. No one served in any leadership role who was not first an advanced Torah student or Torah teacher. Only the learned and prepared could adequately lead as the Messiah taught and modeled. Novices were forbidden to serve in any leadership role.

The rule was simple. If a novice desired to lead, he must first be discipled as an advanced Torah student. Any untrained mind in Scripture knowledge and interpretation passed on by the Twelve Apostles must not serve. If they did not know the Scriptures as interpreted by the apostles, it was most likely they were underdeveloped in the disposition of the Messiah Jesus necessary to lead others.

A novice may be well-intentioned and well-groomed enough, but if he was not well-learned in his preparation he must wait. The Lord calls leaders from among those who are prepared. A serious student who had not mastered Torah study enough to invest himself fully in its wisdom and knowledge of the Messiah was regarded as a novice.

Maturity in Life. Besides the obvious qualification to be a Scripture scholar or advanced student, usually the beginning age for leadership in the congregation was thirty. Why? Torah study was not enough. Learning must be tempered by a mature disposition that represented the Messiah. A disciple who was qualified by study but not by temperament was not permitted to lead.

Some advanced Torah teachers like Rabbi Bun bar Chaya served as teachers at ages earlier than thirty. He was memorialized as a brilliant rabbi, but only served for a short time before dying at the age of twenty-eight. How early in age he became a rabbi is not known, but a parable about him suggests he served only a brief time, perhaps as little as two years.

Many Torah teachers who followed our Lord Jesus became prophets (cf. the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, 15:1). Those who were not prophets sought the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1). Torah teachers (and advanced disciples) were helpful to those who were prophets and formed leadership teams with them.

Prophetic Gifting. Senior leaders were to be not only Torah teachers but gifted as well by the Holy Spirit to speak to congregations as prophets. The combination of Torah teacher and prophetic gifting was a basic requirement for senior leadership of a congregation.

Jesus was the expected prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15). He was the Prophet of prophets. The church, his body, took on his prophetic character in its leaders—first the apostles, second, the prophets and, third, the Torah teachers.

Prophecy wasn't without regulations on its use. Every true prophecy must be the very words of Messiah spoken to the congregation *in words and attitude* (see the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, 11:2, 8). The New Testament taught the same: "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). In paraphrased form you may read it as follows, "To speak the very words of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." When someone prophesies, therefore, they should speak the very words of God *and* be heard as if the Messiah were speaking in person.

Both Torah teachers and prophets exemplified the Messiah Jesus through their own lives and spoken words. They represented his continuing presence in the church body and were worthy of imitation by believers.

Discipleship by Imitation. The command of Torah teaching prophets to believers to imitate their lives as they followed Messiah was the most fundamental way to call and make disciples. Imitation was the "master key" to applying Torah (1 Corinthians 4:16; Hebrews 6:12; 13:7; 3 John 11), the true way of life and discipleship. It provided the context for all teaching methods and revealed the content being taught.

Because spurious teachers and false prophets abounded, as today, the church was warned to not follow any *senior* leader who:

- was not *first* advanced in the wisdom and knowledge of the Torah and its revelation of Messiah
- was not a prophet of God gifted by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the words of Messiah, the living Torah (1 Timothy 4:14)
- depended upon and taught out of the context of mystical experiences (1 Timothy 4:1-3, 7)
- failed to imitate the Messiah's disposition and teachings by example (1 Timothy 4:11, 16).

Paul the apostle was first a Torah teacher and then a prophet (Acts 13:1-3). Likewise, one of his disciples, Timothy, became a Torah teacher first and then a prophet under prophetic teaching. If Paul was unable to visit a distant church to show them what true discipleship was, he still appealed to them to imitate him as he followed the Lord Jesus. To accomplish this, he simply sent Timothy, or another of his disciples, to represent him. To imitate Paul's disciples was to imitate Paul. To imitate Paul was to imitate the Lord Himself.

> I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children . . . for in Messiah Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Messiah Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.
>
> --1 Corinthians 4:14-17

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews (Messianic Believers), likewise, called for the same teaching method in all congregations:

> We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.
>
> --Hebrews 6:12

> Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus the Messiah is the same yesterday and today and forever.
>
> --Hebrews 13:7

Good disciples *follow and imitate* true prophets and Torah teachers.

Tragically, the church organization models we use today tend to lower the qualifications God gave. We lower the standards in order to "qualify" someone or a group to serve as leaders. No wonder we have the confusion and chaos we have in many of our churches.

Receiving True Leaders as Messiah's Representatives

Messiah Jesus was understood to be the Head (*Rosh*) of the church. His prophets and Torah teachers, the closest human resemblances to Him, were to be received, respected and honored as his ambassadors and oversight gifts to the congregations. To see and hear true prophets and Torah teachers was to see and hear Messiah (the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, 11:2, 4).

Rebellion against God's appointed leaders was considered rebellion against the Messiah. For members of a congregation to put a prophet on trial was considered an unpardonable sin against the Messiah who sent him.

Prophets and Torah teachers met together in prayer, study and counsel for the sake of the church and its mission (Acts 13:1). In Jerusalem they formed the Messianic "Sanhedrin" or "elders" who oversaw the greater expansion of the gospel throughout the world. In other cities and towns, they were the church's body of leaders or "elders."

Among many other duties and roles, they were responsible to rule the congregations, make disciples, approve proselytes, teach and lead the congregation, commission approved ministers, ordain by laying on hands, judge issues, discipline and manage the finances.

Restoration of Prophecy

In the first century, prophecy was a sign of the kingdom of heaven come down, not only in Jesus, but also in his followers. Prophecy—to speak the very words of Messiah— was the gift to be greatly desired by all (1 Corinthians 14:1). It would require Torah study and discipleship first.

Normative Jewish synagogues did not recognize the restoration of prophecy by *bat kol*, that is, the "voice of heaven" (literally, "daughter voice," sometimes called the "echo of heaven") as occurred at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration. Messianic synagogues, however, knew the "voice from heaven" about Messiah was true and to be believed. They clearly understood prophecy to be alive again in the church, that all leaders must be able to prophesy and that all believers should desire to prophesy.

Normative Jewish synagogues, on the other hand, taught that prophecy ceased with Malachi.

Prophecy was given to God's people as a result of the risen Messiah sending his Holy Spirit to all his disciples. *The church was a prophetic movement*, (1) announcing the Messiah and his kingdom and (2) proclaiming his *very* words to the congregation. This was fundamental to the self-understanding of the Jewish sect of the Nazarenes and to the earliest Gentile believers. Prophecy was greatly to be desired and practiced, but within its proper context and with the proper content.

Prerequisite to Prophesy was to be a Torah Student. From the best evidence available, prophets were always advanced Torah students or scholars. In The Rubin edition of *The Prophets: Joshua / Judges* edited by Rabbi Nosson Scherman (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 2000, p. *xvii*), the traditional Jewish understanding of a prophet's role as Torah scholar is clearly stated: "Torah knowledge is a prerequisite of prophecy."

This view was held by Hillel, founder of one of the Torah schools existing in the time of Messiah Jesus. The Lord did not dispute it nor did the apostle Paul, one of the most famous students of Hillel's teachings.

According to traditional evidence, usually prophets were at least thirty years old before they began to prophesy though there were exceptions. To be a prophet one must be qualified by (1) an in-depth study and knowledge of the Torah, Prophets and Writings, (2) a clear understanding of the teaching of the Lord and the Twelve and (3) the gifting of the Holy Spirit. Prophets were

required to give a full and truthful answer to any question asked about the Word of God. Their study of Torah made this possible.

Prophets and Torah teachers met together in prayer regularly to study the Scriptures and the Lord's teaching. They cared for the church in various leadership roles. According to their positions, they took personal responsibility for the oversight, administration and conduct of God's work (Acts 13:1).

Leadership Teams: Apostles, Prophets and Torah Teachers. The writer of the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (c. AD 70-80) shows the prominence of prophets and Torah teachers to the fellowship of believers. Prophets and Torah teachers were foundational to the church, the Messiah Jesus being the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:21). Among them were the apostles who founded churches where the gospel had not gone before.

All apostles came from among the prophets and Torah teachers. Hear what the apostle Paul wrote:

> And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then working of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.
>
> –1 Corinthians 12:28

All three—apostles, prophets and [Torah] teachers—were indispensable for leading congregations in the truth of the Messiah. They recognized the calling of God on other men and women and commissioned them into service. All true prophets and teachers, including the apostles, were called "the elders" of the church.

Formation of a Synagogue or "House of Study"

To form a synagogue or "house of study" (*beit midrash*; Greek, *synagogos*) ten men were required. They were called *batlanim* (literally, "men of leisure"). More than ten *batlanim*, of course, may serve the congregation. This unusual phrase "men of leisure" did not mean they were lazy. On the contrary, they were busy at the work of the synagogue or church. What the term "leisure" means is that they were of sufficient financial means or support to give ample time to the synagogue to study and teach the Torah, Prophets and Writings (Old Testament) and to care for the congregation.

In both normative and Messianic synagogues, *batlanim* must all be devout Torah teachers of good report. In Messianic congregations, they included prophets.

Seven of them were called "the seven good men of the city." This number included:

- One *chazan* (public minister)
- Three *nesi'im* or *ro'im* (rulers or judges)
- Three *almoners* or *parnasin* (deacons).

Supporting roles of "the seven good men of the city" were:

- The *meturganim* (interpreter) of the *chazan*
- The *shammash* (servant) or *shaliach* (messenger) of the *Bet Din* (the court)
- The rabbi of the academy or upper synagogue
- The *meturganim* (interpreter) of the rabbi.
- Assistant teachers to the rabbi.

We shall discover what these roles were in the earliest formation of the church.

Jesus did not render obsolete or alter in any way the requirements of a minimum of ten *batlanim* to form a "house of study." He accepted it unchallenged; it did not require changing. Jesus' faithful participation in synagogue life sanctioned it because the synagogue structure, form and various roles revealed who He was and his relationship to his people.

One Hundred and Twenty. A fully functional "house of study" or synagogue had 120 members or more in size. They were led by *batlanim*. Each leader had a well-defined role and job description. A minimum ten *batlanim* were required to fill out all the leadership roles for this size congregation.

It is no mere coincidence that when the Holy Spirit was poured out at the Festival of *Shavuot* (Pentecost) in Acts 2, there were about 120 disciples present, including the Twelve. The Twelve exceeded the minimum number of ten *batlanim* needed to legitimatize the congregation of Spirit-filled believers. Make no mistake. God did not violate the synagogue order and structure to launch a new beginning for his church. He honored it and legitimatised it in the eyes of all Torah observant Jews.

All ten *batlanim* gave leadership as Torah teachers in these larger congregations. Non-Messianic congregations did not have prophets. In Messianic congregations, the *batlanim* were comprised of the Torah teachers and prophets (Acts 13:1-3).

Smaller congregations were formed, mostly in private residences. These were the common "house churches" found throughout normative and Messianic Judaism.

Small congregations used itinerant apostles (*shlichim*), prophets (*nevi'im*) and Torah teachers (*moreh haTorah* or rabbis). They went from "house to house" teaching the Torah. The church in Antioch had five known leaders who were prophets and Torah teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen and Saul of Tarsus. They were of the *batlanim* of the congregation.

The Lord's Plan for Church Order

We learn from this that the Lord God does have a plan of order and organization for his church today—since the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. It is modeled after the "house of study" or synagogue and conforms to it in terms of function and roles. The fact that we turned far away from these original functions and roles does not mean they are invalid or made obsolete. Nor does it mean we've found a better way to do the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

Church history attests that we've not done a very good job since we forfeited the early church model. World evangelization and making disciples of the nations has lagged. We do well to prayerfully reconsider the early church's contributions to world evangelization and discipleship of the nations through the "house of study" model and its spiritual roles.

In this light, let us review the roles and groupings of the *batlanim* in the congregation of 120 members of more.

The *Chazan haKeneset.* A *chazan hakeneset* was the chief public minister to serve the synagogue or church. His title *chazan* distinguished him from the president (*nasi*), though he may be one and the same depending on the circumstances of the synagogue. If it were a large congregation, he may choose not to serve as a *nasi*.

Sometimes he was called *the overseer, the angel of the church* and *the minister of the congregation.* The phrase *angel of the church* is not a good translation of the Hebrew phrase *shaliach tzibbor* from which it is derived, but is one that has been used for centuries. Literally, it translates as *apostle of the congregation* or, better, *apostle of those "joined together as one."* *Tzibbor* is associated with bundling and heaping sheaves of the harvest.

The phrase *angel of the church* does appear in the English version of the Greek New Testament in Revelation 2 and 3. Here the phrase "apostle of the congregation" and "angel of the congregation" are synonymous. Important in the title *shaliach tzibbor* is the word *shaliach*—"apostle" which may be rendered into English as "messenger." In Greek the common word for "messenger" is *angelos* from which we get the word "angel." Hence, we see how the word "apostle" can be easily communicated between Hebrew and Greek and translated on the Greek side as "angel" instead of "apostle."

Apostles did the work of the *chazan* wherever they founded or worked with congregations.

Primary duties for the *chazan* was to:

- oversee the *public* reading of the Hebrew Scriptures in the congregation
- offer *public* prayer in Hebrew at each meeting of the congregation
- teach and preach *publicly* in the congregation in the absence of a guest speaker

His expertise in the Hebrew language and original text of the Bible was of the highest order. A *chazan* gave himself diligently to Torah study and public prayer—just as the Twelve did (cf. Acts 6:4).

In Acts 6:1-6 the story is told of seven Greek-speaking men selected to serve Grecian widows in Jerusalem with the daily distribution of food. They were chosen from among the advanced *talmudim*, that is, the advanced Torah students. They were not selected from the whole congregation as some suppose, as if by an election process. No, they were chosen from the synagogue classroom of advanced students. This was the academy for raising up disciples and leaders. From this group leaders were selected.

This was done in order to permit the apostles to give their attention "to prayer and the ministry of the word." Public prayer and ministry of the Scriptures is the daily work of the synagogue *chazan*.

From this, we get a good picture of what the Twelve did when they served in Jerusalem among the other elders. Each apostle was a *chazan*. Not only were they Torah teachers making *talmudim* (disciples) and also prophets speaking the very words of God in the congregation, they also did the daily synagogue work of a *chazan*. In giving themselves "to prayer and the ministry of the word," they were performing the daily duties of the *chazan*—conducting daily prayer times in the synagogues and overseeing daily Scripture readings with their own lectures, teaching what they learned from Messiah Jesus.

Timothy was also a *chazan*. His young age meant that he was in his thirties. Paul wrote him, saying:

> Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young [in thirties], but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching [the work of the *chazan*]. Do not neglect your gift [of being a *chazan*], which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

According to the job description of a *chazan*, each Sabbath he called out seven readers to read the Scriptures (lesser number on the other six days). He stood to the side of the readers, looking across them to the text being read to assure accuracy. If any error was made in the reading, he stood ready to correct the misreading, guiding the readers.

In synagogue meetings during the first and second centuries, the *chazan* welcomed visiting or nearby sages to preach or teach. He provided for a variety of speakers. When an itinerant Torah teacher or preacher was not passing through or available from whom they could learn, he preached and taught.

A way of understanding and appreciating his role is to consider him the Scripture coach, prayer leader and lesson overseer. We know this was a major part of the role of apostles in Jerusalem and elsewhere as they established new congregations.

The *Meturganim*. Among the ten *batlanim* ("men of leisure" in charge of the synagogue's daily role and functions) was the *meturganim* ("interpreter"). The word is a form or the Hebrew word *tirgem* ("interpret," "translate" or "add to the meaning"). It is associated with the Aramaic word *Targum* which is an Aramaic paraphrase or translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The interpreter was needed to interpret Hebrew for those who spoke Aramaic or Greek in the congregation. He stood by the *chazan* when he offered public prayer in Hebrew to interpret for him into the vernacular. He also stood by the readers of the Hebrew Scriptures and loudly interpreted what was read so all could say "Amen!" Prayers and Scripture readings were done in Hebrew.

The spiritual gift of interpreter in 1 Corinthians 14:16 was given by the Spirit so believers could understand and say "Amen!" to the praise or prayer made to God in heavenly tongues.

The *Nasi* (President) or *Nesi'im* (Presidents). The term *nasi* means "one who presides." Our English word "president" or "ruler" is a close equivalent. In the Greek it appears as *archisynagogo* meaning "ruler of the synagogue."

In Judaism during the Second Temple Era, the head of the Sanhedrin was called the *nasi* or "prince." He was de facto the spiritual leader of the people. Second in importance to him was the chief of the court or the *av beit din*.

In the well-established Messianic synagogues, as in normative synagogues, there were three presidents or rulers, one of whom was the chief ruler as "James" (that is, Jacob) was in Jerusalem. They formed a tribunal called "the bench of three." Together, they were the "court" of the saints to whom all judicial issues were brought to avoid the court of the Gentiles (see 1 Corinthians 6:1). They judged financial disputes, thefts, losses, restitutions, immorality, admission of proselytes and performed the duty of laying on of hands to commission others for service. They were the highest and final authority in all questions, disputes and issues, using the Messiah's authority to "bind and loose" in these matters.

We should recall that the twelve apostles did not serve as *nesi'im* ("presidents) or *ro'im* (Shepherd-rulers) in Jerusalem, though most lived there for several years before expanding the base of the church to regions beyond. Jacob (erroneously called James) was the "Shepherd-ruler" of the church in Jerusalem and was *not* one of the apostles. He was a *nasi* or *ro'eh*. Here we see that a *chazan* was not always a *nasi* or *ro'eh*.

The Apostle Paul, in his Letter to the Philippians, addresses (1) the *kiddushim* (the righteous ones or saints), (2) the *nesi'im* (Messianic synagogue presidents or rulers) and (3) the *gabbay tzedikah* ("deacons") (Philippians 1:1).

Give attention to the second of those greeted by Paul—the *nesi'im*. It is rendered in the Greek language as the word *episcopois* (plural) instead of the actual Hebrew word. One English translation renders it as "the presidents" (TCNT). These were the presiding rulers of the Messianic synagogues. As we shall see, the word *episcopos* (singular) does not differentiate between the Hebrew titles of *nasi* and *ro'eh*, both being the same person.

The "presidents" or "rulers" presided over all administrative and judicial duties of the synagogue. The chief care of all matters pertaining to the "house of study" and its role in the community of Jews and Gentiles was the main mission.

The gift of "administration" or, better translated, the gift of "governing" (Greek, *kyberneseis*), in 1 Corinthians 12:28 refers to those gifted by the Spirit to serve as *nasi*, the governing authorities of the congregation.

The *Ro'eh* (Ruler) or *Ro'im* (Rulers). The *nesi'im* ("presidents") were also called *ro'im*, literally means "shepherd-rulers" of the synagogue (cf. Mark 5:22). They ruled the sages (the Torah teachers) as well as congregational life and practices.

In the Greek New Testament the word is *episcopos* from which we get the word "overseer." By the end of the second century the word "bishop" gradually began to be used for this office, a sign that the synagogue model for believers' meetings was beginning to wane under Gentile influence. The word "bishop" is a later derived Gentile word, substituting for the original Hebrew words of *nasi* and *ro'eh*. A Gentile bishop carried a shepherd's staff, reminiscent and symbolic of the original Hebrew meaning of his office.

In Ephesians 4:11, five spiritual gifts given by Messiah Jesus to the church are listed. They are for governing the congregation's life and practices. All five gifts are real human beings. The Messiah came in flesh like we are. His direct representatives to oversee and govern church life, likewise, must be human. When they are seen, the believers should see leaders who imitate the Messiah in words and disposition.

These five gifts are apostles (*shlichim*), prophets (*nevi'im*), evangelists (*mevasserim*), Shepherd-rulers (*ro'im*) and Torah teachers (*morim haTorah*) (Ephesians 4:11). They were all elders responsible to build up the congregation for worship of God and service to man, and to present them to the Lord as mature disciples in the stature of the Lord.

We are considering the fourth category of elders mentioned in this text—Shepherd-rulers. The word "pastors" in our English Bible is from the Hebrew word *ro'im.* A *ro'eh* (singular of *ro'im*) was a ruling leader of the congregation. He oversaw the meetings, administered the work, directed the education of believers, managed the facilities, directed the finances and oversaw the mission. He was also a *nasi* (president) who sat on the bench of the tribunal.

All these matters were called "spiritual," contrary to the Gentile worldview that separates the so-called "spiritual" from the "secular" or "real world." A heresy that affected the early church in predominantly Greek cultures was Docetism. It was based on Greek philosophy that separated the spiritual from the secular. The Apostle John debunked it (1 John 1:1-2 *et al*). So did the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 *et al*). We need to debunk it again today, for it still prevails in many congregations where the pastor's work is described as "spiritual" and the work of some boards or committees as "real world" or secular. This is a false division of labor.

When the *ro'eh* "sat down" to teach, render a judgment or give a revelation from the seat of Messiah, everything else in the meeting ceased. He was speaking as the Messiah would speak and his words were received in that context.

He was not above judgment for errors in teaching or practices, but the judgment did not come from the congregation. The other two or more *nesi'im* (presidents) were his peer group as they were for all the prophets and Torah teachers. They held him accountable.

In no case, like our churches often do today, did accountability and judgment of the leaders come from within the body of the church membership or its elected representatives. To do such was equivalent to judging the Messiah Himself. The *Teaching of the Twelve* says that those who do such things shall not be forgiven (11:7). The *batlanim* held council on such matters, heard the case and passed judgment.

The *Mashgiach Ruchani* (Spiritually Highest One). Another synonym for the *nasi* (president) or *ro'eh* (Shepherd-ruler) was the *mashgiach ruchani. Ruchani* means "spiritual" and *mashgiach*

means the "highest one" or "greatest one" in the Messianic synagogue or congregation. In our English Bible, it is usually toned down from its superlative attribute of respect and rendered as "overseer."

According to the Hebrew New Testament, the passage in 1 Timothy 3:1 refers to the *mashgiach ruchani*.

> Faithful is the word: if anyone aspires to be the *mashgiach ruchani* ["highest one" of the congregation], he is desirous of a good work. It is necessary then that the *mashgiach ruchani* ["highest one" of the congregation] be irreproachable, husband of one wife, sober, serious, well-behaved [like Messiah], hospitable, apt to teach [Torah]; not given to wine, not a striker, not greedy of disgraceful gain, but gentle [like Messiah], not contentious, not loving money; ruling his own house well [so he can rule the house of God well], having his children in subjection with all dignity . . . not a novice . . . And it is necessary for him also to have a good testimony from the outside . . .

The level of Messianic authority and respect the *nasi* (*ro'eh* or *mashgiach ruchani*) had in the early days of the church movement was indisputable.

Court of Three Judges. The "bench" was, of course, the seat of authority and bench of justice in the synagogue from which the Torah was applied to all situations in the tradition of Moses. They were the chief elders of all elders—the ruling elders. They were the judges.

The bench of judgment faltered in the Jewish-Gentile congregation in Corinth, not because of the judges but due to the calloused consideration many of the congregation gave to their roles and judgments. The Apostle Paul shamed the believers for their failure to allow for judgment to occur in even trivial matters (1 Corinthians 6:1-11).

In the smallest congregation there was never fewer than three who sat on the bench. The number may be much larger as it was in some urban synagogues, and no rule was applied to limit the number. One important regulation was that the number be uneven so there would never be a split decision.

We find further evidence of this "bench" not only in 1 Corinthians 6, but also in 1 Corinthians 14:29-30. In the Messianic "house of study," the bench is the ruling seat of the Messiah.

The "bench of elders," as it was sometimes called, sat before the *Hecall* (the place of the Ark containing the Torah scrolls) facing the people. The people sat in rows, rank upon rank, facing the *Hecall* and, in front, the bench of elders. When one of the elders sitting on the bench stood to pray, he stood before the Ark facing the people.

In a meeting it was the duty of the bench to guarantee that all things were done appropriately and in order (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:40).

Regard for the "presidents" or "rulers" who sit on the bench was so high that they were seen as the representatives of the Lord Jesus in all administrative, judicial and spiritual matters. They had first priority in speaking to the congregation. They had authority to overrule any other speaker, including someone prophesying:

> Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down [on the bench], the first speaker should stop.

The ones "sitting down" in this passage are the ultimate authorities and representatives of the Messiah when there is a question or dispute. Overall, they dealt with all weighty matters related to faithful obedience to the commandments (Hebrew, *mitzvot*) of the Lord Jesus. They had the power to "bind and loose."

The bench could be substituted for thrones, each ruling elder with his own throne.

From this bench of ultimate and supreme authority to judge and rule, we glean a better understanding of the twenty-four elders sitting on twenty-four thrones around the throne of God (Revelation 4:4). They fell "before him who sits on the throne, and worship him . . ." (Revelation 4:10), submitting to his rule and judgment.

The *Shammash* or *Shaliach Bet Din*. Each synagogue had one person who served the congregation as the *shammash* ("servant") or "*shaliach* (messenger) of the court." Paul was such a person when he was sent to Syria to persecute the Jewish believers in Messiah Jesus. Paul was first an apostle of persecution before he was an apostle of the Lord Jesus to Gentiles.

The phrase *Bet Din* means "house of judgment" or "courthouse." He was the servant of the congregation and assisted the *nesi'im*. He was the caretaker, messenger and took care of details for the synagogue and the judges. He administered "stripes" on those sentenced by the judges. When the *minyan* (the ten *batlanim*) were needed, he brought them together. He made the arrangements for weddings and funerals. At sunset on Friday, he announced the arrival of the Sabbath by blowing six blasts on the shofar.

The *Almoner, Parnas* or *Gabbay Tzedikah*—the Deacon. In a congregation of 120 or more, at least three *batlanim* served the widows of the congregation. Each was referred to by three different Hebrew titles:

- *almoner* (from Hebrew, *'almon*, "widowhood," meaning "one who cares for widows")
- *parnas* ("distributor" or "feeder")—plural, *parnasin*
- *gabbay tzedikah* (collector of righteousness)

The number may range higher than three in larger congregations, depending upon the need of widows and their cultural requirements. For example, in ancient Jerusalem when the population was mostly Hebrew speaking Jews, seven Greek-speaking *almoners* or *parnasin* were chosen to distribute food to the Grecian Jewish widows neglected by the Hebrew-speaking *almoners* (Acts 6:3). The choice of the Greek-speaking Seven was to overcome the language and cultural barrier that caused neglect and inadequate care. This implies that there were other *almoners* or *parnasin*, but they served Hebrew-speaking widows. The Seven was not the total number of "deacons," but an addition to the existing number.

Within the minimum number of three, two of the three *almoners* or *parnasin* were alms-collectors. The other was the distributor of the money or goods. The collectors were called *gabbay tzedikah*. The word *gabbay* is derived from three Hebrew letters represented without vowels as *g-v-h*, meaning "collect" or "gather."

The Hebrew word *tzedikah*, from which the word "deacon" was later derived as a shortened form, comes from the words "righteousness" (*tzadakah*) and "righteous" or "just" (*tzaddik)* and closely corresponds to the word "faithful" (*emeth*; cf. Isaiah 41:26).

The title "tax collector" in Hebrew is *gabbay sallay*. It was a repugnant title—"collector of taxes." Taxes, in this case, were collected for Caesar of Rome. Those who gathered the taxes were oppressive and, worse, were considered to have committed treason.

The title *gabbay tzedikah* contrasts an alms-collector to a tax collector. The *gabbay tzedikim* (pural) were "collectors of righteousness" as well as "righteous collectors."

The work of the group of deacons was well-defined: (1) alms-collecting for the widows and poor, (2) managing the alms-treasury, (3) exchanging the alms, when necessary, into food, clothing, shelter and other needs, and then (4) distributing the money, goods and services regularly, faithfully, fairly and according to need.

This was no ordinary duty of service. These "deacons," as Gentile-based churches now call them, were advanced *talmudim* (disciples) of the Torah in both normative and Messianic synagogues. They were scholars in their own right. It was this supreme qualification that set them apart for the duties they performed so the *chazan* may devote himself to public prayer ministry and study of the Scriptures for public teaching.

Rabbi Isidore Epstein, editor of *Soncino Talmud*, Shab. 114a (London: Soncino Press, 1948), wrote of the tradition of selecting "deacons" in the time of our Lord Jesus. The question was asked, "Who is a scholar worthy of being appointed *Parnas* ["distributor" or "feeder"]?" The answer was: "He who is asked about a law [of the Torah] from any source, and is able to give an answer."

The Torah test for all deacons is clearly shown in 1 Timothy 3:9-10. It was both a test of the knowledge of the Torah and the practice of it in a clear conscience of obedience:

> They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith [of the Torah, Prophets and Writings] with a clear conscience. They must first be tested [in knowledge of and obedience to the Torah, Prophets and Writings]; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons [*gabbay tzedikim*].

Synagogues laid out stringent qualifications for "deacons", that is, the *gabbay tzedikim*, *almoners* or *parnasin*. They must be:

- thirty years of age or older except for exceptional scholars of the Torah, Prophets and Writings
- married and able managers of their own home before they may teach and help widows, their children, orphans and other poor persons manage their homes
- of good reputation in the larger community
- Advanced Torah students or scholars able to give complete answers to any question concerning the Scriptures asked by widows, their children, orphans or anyone else they served
- tested in money matters sufficient to assume fiduciary responsibility for the alms
- knowledgeable of sources and resources to help the poor and hurting.

In Messianic congregations, other rules were applied. Here are a few:

- they must be full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3)—a way of saying they must be prophetic
- they must serve as personal representatives of the Messiah to the poor, bearing his disposition, message and outlook
- they must be long-term disciples able to teach the Word, unlike recent converts not adequately discipled and tested.

Service to the poor was the "righteous" work of the congregation through "deacons." They worked under the oversight of the *nasi* (president) or *ro'eh* (Shepherd-ruler) and the *chazan*.

Jacob, the half-brother of Jesus, otherwise known as James, was the *nasi* (president) or *ro'eh* (ruler) of the Jerusalem church. He called the work of the congregation through deacons as "pure religion" (James 1:27). Anyone in the congregation who did the same work for the poor did righteous work.

Paul refers to the work of the Lord as a "distributor" or "feeder" of the poor and helpless in 2 Corinthians 9:9. The Lord Messiah is the Chief Deacon. Then in verses 10-12 he speaks of human "distributors" (*almoners*) or "feeders" (*parnasin*) who abound in fruits of righteousness (referring to the *gabbay tzedikah*). This is the righteous work of deacons:

> And now the One supplying seed for the sowing and bread for the eating, may he supply and may he multiply your sowing, and may he increase the fruits of your righteousness: in all things being enriched to all liberality, which works out through us thanksgiving to God. Because of this service of distribution [Hebrew, *parnasin*; Greek, *diakonia*], not only is it completely filling up the shortages of the saints [Hebrew, *kiddushim*], but is abounding through many thanksgivings to God.

Paul gives thanks for the work of deacons, calling their "service" (vs. 13) to the poor God's "indescribable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15). The service of the *gabbay tzedikah* is "beyond description" (Greek, *anekdiegetos*).

The concept we use today for deacon is foreign to the idea and work of the deacons in the Scriptures. Their main concern was to represent the Messiah to people who needed help in tragic circumstances beyond their control. They blessed the poor and helpless with sufficient care and provision to live another day, week or year.

Jesus the Holy One supplies seed for sowing and bread for eating for all—for we are all poor without his abundant care. Deacons labor in this same work under the Chief Deacon, supplying seed for sowing and bread for eating, to bring about thanksgiving to God among the poor and hurting. This is the true labor of the deacon, the work of "pure religion," the "indescribable gift" of God to the poor.

Their motive in receiving alms and distributing care gifts was to provoke or bring about thanksgiving to God among the needy. The needy are given to complaint. Provoking thanksgiving to God was the ultimate objective of their work and the measurement of their success.

Unlike so-called "deacons" found in many churches today, especially the congregationally-governed variety, these deacons of the early church movement were different. They did not do oversight work of the whole church, serve as a board of directors or advisors, or manage the overall finances. This work belonged only to the "presidents" or "rulers" who served as senior leaders of the church. Instead, deacons did the righteous work of caring and helping the needy and hurting.

The Rabbi or Master Teacher. Another of the ten major leaders in the church or synagogue was the rabbi (sage). He must be forty years of age or older and married, or a widower who raised his family well. One of the Torah teachers served as the rabbi or master of the synagogue's school or academy, sometimes referred to as *the upper synagogue*. After the Sabbath meeting, followed by dinner, the disciples (*talmudim*) returned for Torah study. The sage or rabbi lectured.

When the number of pupils rose above forty, the rabbi brought on an assistant teacher to help him. When the number increased ten more to fifty, he brought on a second assistant to help him teach.

Bear in mind that all the *batlanim* (the ten or more leaders) were Torah teachers. This was a basic qualification. In Messianic circles, the synagogue leaders were to be prophetic as well, speaking the very words of Messiah when they addressed believers.

The mission of the Torah teacher or rabbi, in both normative synagogues and Messianic congregations, was to make disciples (*talmudim*). This mission was incorporated into the language of Jesus when he spoke to his disciples to "go into all the world and make disciples

(*talmudim*) of all nations" (cf. Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus was saying he wanted the disciples (*talmudim*) He had made, to make disciples on their own, thus passing on what they had learned to others who, in turn, would pass it on to others. This concept is called *kibel* and *masar*.

Not all rabbis or Torah teachers had an academy or synagogue school. Many worked as itinerant teachers, gathering students to work and travel with them. Others worked from their hometowns. Jesus did both, working from Capernaum, his hometown, and throughout the land. A popular saying was that disciples of Torah teachers were to "sit in their dust," that is, to follow them on the dusty roads and gather around their feet to learn the Torah.

They taught Torah wherever they went, usually from synagogue to synagogue. The *chazan* of the synagogue who oversaw the public prayers and preaching, depended on itinerant rabbis to visit and teach occasionally on the Sabbath when he was not speaking.

Disciple-making was the work of Torah teachers. Many were compelled to go through the land and among the nations to make disciples. Winning disciples through profession of faith in the Lord Jesus wasn't enough. To *make* disciples was the objective, and that could only be achieved through Torah teaching. For this reason, itinerant rabbis may choose to make disciples in a village or city for one to two years before moving on to the next village. They taught daily in the synagogues and in homes.

When a disciple was learned, he may become a rabbi (master teacher). The change of status from disciple to teacher was marked by water baptism, usually when the disciple was about thirty years of age. Even then he was not a full-blown sage or rabbi until he reached the age of forty or more.

Water baptism was used in ancient Judaism, including the Jewish sect of the Nazarenes (*Nazoraioi*; followers of Jesus) to mark and demonstrate a change of status. Water baptism for repentance was done when a person repented of his sins and became a disciple. "Repent and be baptized," Peter declared, "every one of you, in the name of Jesus Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38).

Other baptisms were done, too, all to show a change of status. A betrothed bride was baptized to show her change of status. A slave was baptized to show his freedom. A priest was baptized at age of thirty for the same reason—to indicate a change of status from a learner priest to a practicing priest. In the same way, a disciple of a rabbi was baptized when he was ready to go out on his own and be a Torah teacher, gathering his own disciples.

These baptisms were still vital to church life with the exception of the ceremonial washings at the Temple that were done to show one's innocence—change of status—after laying hands on a sacrificial animal. In Messianic congregations before the Temple was destroyed, the practice of ceremonial washings to prepare oneself for animal sacrifice ended.

The writer of Hebrews admonished believers to end ceremonial washings related to animal sacrifice in the Temple.

> Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Messiah and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death [that is, to offer more sin sacrifices at the Temple], and of faith in God [through the practice of sacrifice], instruction about ceremonial washings [for sacrifice], the laying on of hands [for a sin sacrifice at the Temple], the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so.
>
> Hebrews 6:1-4

The *Meturganim* (Interpreter) of the Master Torah Teacher. When students were not Hebrew speakers, nevertheless, the rabbi taught his students (*talmudim*) in Hebrew using a *meturganim* to interpret his Torah lessons into Aramaic, or in a Gentile setting, into Greek.

In these cases, the rabbi whispered his teaching into the ear of the *meturganim*. The interpreter raised his voice to the housetop and loudly announced the interpretation to the students so all in the house could hear. In Matthew 10:27 Jesus illustrates the importance of his message by alluding to the role of the interpreter:

> What I tell you in the dark,
> speak in the daylight;
> What is whispered in your ear,
> proclaim from the roofs.

If there was no interpreter present, the rabbi did not teach, but kept quiet, reviewing the Scriptures, reading them quietly to himself, and praying. The students, then, studied the Scriptures on their own for that session.

In the Messianic meeting, Hebrew was also used regularly and was interpreted in Aramaic, Greek or whatever was the common language. But a spiritual gift of tongues beyond Hebrew also occurred. This was "the language of angels," as it was commonly called, a euphemism for "the language of God." It was not a human language, though humans could speak it to God. Nor was it foreign to the understanding and teachings of Jewish sages. Exodus Rabbah 5:9 comments on the phenomenon of "separated tongues of God" being spoken as "tongues of fire" at Mt. Sinai (cf. Exodus 19:16; 20:18 in Hebrew). These heavenly tongues must be interpreted, however, so all the congregation could benefit and say "amen" to the spiritual praise, prayer, hymn or thanksgiving made to God. When no interpreter was present, the listeners were to pause quietly, pray to the Lord and study the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 14:28).

The *Shaliach* (Apostle) or *Shlichim* (Apostles). From among the prophets and Torah teachers, according to the Holy Spirit's calling and gifting, apostles (*shlichim*) were sent to the regions beyond where no work was done or where it was in infancy stage.

Apostles started congregations in cities and villages in previously unreached territories. They were the manifest example of Torah life and they taught in Hebrew, Aramaic and, for some like Paul, in the vernacular of Gentiles. Oversight of fledgling beginnings belonged to them. They brought with them others in their teams who took over synagogue leadership and teacher roles to form the congregation and to make disciples (*talmudim*) of believers.

The apostle was founder of congregational life. At first, by default he was "president" (*nasi*), ruler (*ro'eh*), prophet (*navi*), deacon (*gabbay tzedikah*) and teacher (*moreh* and rabbi). The senior leadership of *nasi* or *ro'eh* soon gave way to others of his entrusted team. So did the alms collecting and distribution role of deacon (*parnas* or *gabbay tzedikah*). He remained as the *chazan* (public minister) and rabbi until surrendering the *chazan* role to an advanced Torah student. He then moved on to another place.

The normative Jewish synagogue also sent out *shlichim*, that is, apostles to Jews who were scattered among the nations to (1) teach Torah observance and (2) raise up new congregations. They also made disciples from among the Gentiles. These Gentile disciples were classified as "God-fearers" and "proselytes." Proselytes were immersed, became Torah observant and worshiped in synagogues and received new names as "sons of Abraham." God-fearers, on the other hand, were Torah aware, but not fully Torah observant. The men were not circumcised. They attended synagogue and followed a code of morality and ethics established for them by the Sanhedrin.

A *shaliach* (apostle) of a Messianic synagogue did basically the same work as one sent from a normative Jewish synagogue, but with a vital difference. The apostle of the Lord Messiah proclaimed and taught that the Torah was "filled up" in Jesus of Nazareth and that all who put their faith in Him, Jew or Gentile, would be saved. This was the message that the apostle Paul took to the Gentiles.

As we have seen, a resident apostle, as in Jerusalem, worked out from the synagogues where he served as a *chazan* for daily public offerings of prayer, oversight of the Scripture readings and for teaching the lesson. They also did the work of itinerant rabbis, teaching the gospel wherever they went, making disciples (*talmudim*).

The *Navi* or *Nevi'im* (plural). What the Messianic synagogue had that the normative Jewish synagogue did not was the *navi* or prophet. This was a critical distinctive. In the coming of the Messiah and his kingdom, prophecy returned to the people of God. Churches were to be prophetic, and the prophets of the church were to speak as Messiah spoke—the very words of God (1 Peter 4:11). To hear a true prophet was to hear Messiah Jesus speaking to his church. Prophets, therefore, were to be received as the Lord Himself (*Teaching of the Twelve*, 11:3-4).

A prophet may be residential to a Messianic synagogue and derive his support from the church, or he may be itinerant, traveling to the congregations.

The *Mevasserim* or Evangelists. One other important role was the evangelist, a migratory Jewish minister who announced the gospel to willing hearers to expand or start churches. The word *mevasserim* comes from the Hebrew verb *basar* ("bring a joyful message") and means "one who takes the gospel to others." The evangelist took the gospel of salvation to those desiring good news of Jesus. Another name for a migratory evangelist was *maggid*.

A difference from apostles was that evangelists did their work as an expansion of the mother congregation into regions still in proximity to the mother church. Apostles took the gospel to remote, unreached regions beyond the mother church's influence with apostolic teams to start and build the work.

As with all the other leaders of the church, evangelists were Torah teachers with a prophetic message to make disciples and build up the church.

Spiritual Gifts in the Messianic Congregation

A significant difference in the Messianic congregation from the normative Jewish congregation, as noted earlier, was the return of the prophetic voice of God to the church. Prophecy declared the presence and full coming of the kingdom of God; it sustained and encouraged the church in its stresses and strains (1 Corinthians 14:3). Though it was only one of many spiritual gifts that characterized the church, it dominated the church's self-understanding and tone. Almost any believer at that time would certainly say that the church was built on the foundation "stones" of apostles and prophets, with Jesus being the cornerstone. Jesus was Chief Apostle and Prophet (Ephesians 2:20).

The Temple held much symbolic meaning awaiting full revelation in the Messiah and his people. The synagogue was the same and still holds much important meaning for believers today.

From the elevation of the written Torah scrolls that represented the Living Torah, the Messiah, to the offices and functions of the ancient synagogue, signs and pictures of Messiah were easily seen by believers.

Of significance were the offices or roles of the *batlanim* (the ten or more leaders who formed the synagogue). In Messiah Jesus was their fulfillment. If the synagogue was the place of the

gathering of those redeemed by Messiah—and it was, then the Messiah was prefigured in every leadership role:

- the *chazan* (the chief public minister and overseer of Scripture)
- the *nasi* (the President or head of the church)
- the *ro'eh* (the shepherd-ruler)
- the *mashgiach ruchani* [the "Spiritually Highest One" of the congregation]
- the *gabbay tzedikah* (the Chief Deacon and Righteous Servant of the poor and helpless)
- the *meturganim* (the Revelation of the Torah, Prophets and Writings)
- the *moreh haTorah* or rabbi (the Master Teacher who is the Living Torah)
- the *shaliach* (the Apostle of apostles)
- the *navi* (the Prophet of prophets)

If there was a question before about whether all these offices came from Torah scholars and prophets, now it may be better understood. All offices were to be filled by Torah scholars (or advanced disciples) and prophets because they:

- were spiritually gifted with the mind of the Messiah so they would think, act and speak like Him by his Spirit in wisdom, understanding, counsel, power, knowledge and the fear of the Lord (cf. Isaiah 11:2-3)
- were living portraits and examples themselves of the Messiah by their leadership roles, teaching ministry, prophecies, conduct and disposition
- possessed a kingdom-orientation in this world.

They must be able in any role or function to teach and prophesy the very words of the Messiah and act according to his disposition, building up the church until it, too, attained maturity. Otherwise, they were false leaders, not measuring up to the full stature of the Anointed One. Consider again Ephesians 4:11-13 in this context:

> It was he [Messiah] who gave some to be apostles [*shlichim*], some to be prophets [*nevi'im*], some to be evangelists [*mevasserim*], and some to be Shepherd-rulers [*ro'im*] and teachers [*morim ha Torah*], to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Messiah may be built up until all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Messiah.

This attainment to maturity is an achievable goal in the Lord. It opens the possibility that all may be made into disciples who teach Torah and prophesy. For this reason, Paul admonished the Corinthian congregations to follow after lovingkindness (that is, the Lord's disposition) and, thereby, earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1).

The church is akin to sheep led by under-shepherds commissioned by the Chief Shepherd. Those commissioned by the Lord are spiritual gifts to lead and prepare the sheep.

APPENDIX 4

CHRISTIAN LIFE ASSEMBLY MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

Christian Life Assembly

Membership Covenant

...Having received Christ Jesus as my Lord and Savior,
...Having been baptized in water,
...Having agreed with the doctrine, philosophy, and ministry statement of Christian Life Assembly,

I now feel led by the Holy Spirit to unite with the Christian Life Church family. In doing so, I commit myself to God and to other Christian Life Assembly members to do the following:

1. I will protect the unity of my Church
   ...by acting in love toward other members
   ...by refusing to gossip
   ...by following the leadership
   ...by resolving conflict in accordance with Matthew 5:23-26 and Matthew 18:15-20

   - "So let us concentrate on the things which make for harmony, and on the growth of our fellowship together." (Romans 14:19 Phillips)

   - "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs." (Ephesians 4:29)

   - "Have a sincere love for other believers, love one another earnestly with all your heart." (I Peter 1:22 TEV)

   - "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be no advantage to you." (Hebrews 13:17)

2. I will share the responsibility for my Church
...by praying for its growth and success
...by inviting the unchurched to attend
...by warmly welcoming those who visit

   - "We always thank God for you and pray for you constantly." (I Thessalonians 1:1-2 TLB)

   - "The Master said to the servant, "Go out to the road and country lanes, and urge the people there to come so my house will be full." (Luke 14:23 NCV)

- "So, warmly welcome each other into the Church, just as Christ has warmly welcomed you; then God will be glorified." (Romans 15:7 TLB)

3. I will serve God through the ministry of my church

   ...by discovering my gifts and talents
   ...by being equipped to serve by my pastors
   ...by developing a servant's heart

   - "Serve one another with the particular gifts God has given each of you". (I Peter 4:10 Phillips)

   - "God gave...some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." (Ephesians 4:11-12)

   - "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who took on the very nature of a servant" (Philippians 2:3-4,7)

4. I will support the integrity and testimony of my church

   ...by attending faithfully both the corporate and small-group gatherings
   ...by living a Godly life
   ...by giving regularly

   - "Let us not give up meeting together...but let us encourage one another." (Hebrews 10:25)

   - "Whatever happens, make sure that your everyday life is worthy of the gospel of Christ." (Philippians 1:27 Phillips)

   - "Each one of you, on the first day of the week, should set aside a specific sum of money in proportion to what you have earned and use it for the offering." (I Corinthians 16:2 TLB)

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Pastor's Signature: _____[1]

[1] Adapted from Saddleback Church, *"Christian Life And Service Seminars"* church manuals, Lake Forest, CA, 1994. Used in Christian Life Assembly, Columbia, South Carolina, Partners in Ministry manual, 2000.

APPENDIX 5

CHRISTIAN LIFE ASSEMBLY MINISTRY COVENANT

My Christian Life Assembly

Ministry Covenant

Having committed myself to membership and the habits essential for spiritual maturity and agreeing with the ministry statement of Christian Life Assembly, I commit to:

1. Discovering my unique "SHAPE" for ministry and serving in the area that best expresses what God made me to be.

2. Preparing for ministry by participating in Sunday Celebration Services as well as "We Build People" classes and seminars.

3. Demonstrating a servant's heart by serving in "secondary ministries" as the body needs me.

4. Cooperating with other ministries and placing the great good of the Christian Life Community over the needs of my ministry.

I understand that appointment to ministry is for a specified term, and re-appointment is at the discretion of Christian Life leadership and a sense of God's leading in my own heart.

I agree that…

- my ministry shall conform to the doctrine and philosophy of Christian Life Assembly.
- Any doctrinal or philosophical difference will be made known to a member of the pastoral staff. I further understand that it is my responsibility to refrain from teaching any doctrines or philosophies in conflict with the ministry and position of Christian Life Assembly.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Pastor's Signature: _____[1]

[1] Adapted from Saddleback Church, *"Christian Life And Service Seminars"* church manuals, Lake Forest, CA, 1994. Used in Christian Life Assembly, Columbia, South Carolina, Partners in Ministry manual, 2000.

APPENDIX 6

PERCEPTIONS OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT SURVEY LETTER

Dear Fellow Minister,

My name is Stephen Chitty and I am an ordained minister serving Christian Life Assembly in Columbia, South Carolina. I am also a Doctor of Ministry Candidate with Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. My final project thesis concerns strengths and weaknesses within our congregations insofar as church government is concerned.

There has been much talk in the pastoral circles concerning how pastors view the Assemblies of God form of government. The question is, "Is this how most pastors feel, or is this just a few louder voices bringing up these issues?" I realize that this is a controversial area, but I assure you that my goals are to enhance our fellowship. Would you be so kind as to take a few moments to respond to me with the enclosed survey?

The survey is brief and anonymous, yet there is opportunity for further comment if you like. If you indicate your name and address, I will be happy to provide you with summary results of the survey upon completion.

Please return your survey in the postage paid envelope by date.
Thank you, and may the Lord's richest blessings be upon your ministry.

Sincerely,

Stephen Chitty
Christian Life Assembly
Columbia, South Carolina

Enclosed

APPENDIX 7

PERCEPTIONS OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT SURVEY

Perceptions of Church Government
Survey of Assemblies of God Ministers
by Rev. Stephen Chitty
Doctor of Ministry Candidate, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

This survey is designed to identify *perception* among Assemblies of God ministers. Please remember, your answers will be anonymous.

Understanding of terms:

- **Decision-making: the process whereby positions of ministry are filled, money is spent, vision is cast and energy is directed.**
- **Church business is seen as encompassing the spiritual, financial and ministry dynamics of the local Assembly.**

Please tell me a little about your ministry:

How many years have you been in the ministry? _____ How many years at this church? _____ How many members? _____ Average Sunday Morning attendance? _____ What do you call the lay leaders who assist in church government (i.e. deacons, elders, advisors, trustees)? _____

Concerning Local Church Governance: *(circle one response for each question)*

1. **In actual practice, the chief policy/decision maker is:**
   - **A. The Pastor**
   - **B. The Deacons or Board of Trustee**
   - **C. Shared process by Pastor and Board**

2. **In your opinion, church business is most successfully facilitated when:**
   - **A. The Pastor is the primary decision-maker.**
   - **B. The Deacon/Trustee Board is the primary decision-maker.**
   - **C. The responsibility is shared between pastor and board/lay-committee.**

3. **In your opinion, the amount of lay-leader (deacon, trustees etc.) input in decision-making should be:**
   - **A. None**
   - **B. Limited to advisory level**
   - **C. Equal to the Pastor -consensus**
   - **D. Total -delegated to committees/lay-leaders teams**

4. **As a pastor, deacon/trustee boards have been a very positive dynamic of my ministry.**
   Strongly agree ***Agree*** ***No opinion/not sure*** ***Disagree*** ***Strongly disagree***

5. **My ministry and the welfare of the church have been hindered more than helped by the existing board structure.**
   Strongly agree ***Agree*** ***No opinion/not sure*** ***Disagree*** ***Strongly disagree***

6. **Church government in my Assembly is cumbersome.**
   Strongly agree ***Agree*** ***No opinion/not sure*** ***Disagree*** ***Strongly disagree***

Concerning District and National Office Governance: *(circle your answer)*

7. **I have found the District to be consistently supportive of pastoral leadership in terms of local church government.**
   Strongly agree ***Agree*** ***No opinion/not sure*** ***Disagree*** ***Strongly disagree***

8. **I have found the District Office to be a supportive resource in times of conflict within my congregation.**
   Strongly agree ***Agree*** ***No opinion/not sure*** ***Disagree*** ***Strongly disagree***

9. **Hearing the talk of others, it has caused me concern that in certain situations, my District might inappropriately move to impede the sovereignty of my local congregation.**
   Strongly agree Agree No opinion/not sure Disagree Strongly disagree
10. **I feel the District or National office should have property reversion rights over each local Assembly.**
    Strongly agree Agree No opinion/not sure Disagree Strongly disagree
11. **Sovereignty of local church government means that a local congregation should be able to dis-associate itself from National or District affiliation under certain justifiable circumstances.**
    Strongly agree Agree No opinion/not sure Disagree Strongly disagree
12. **Once an Assembly of God congregation becomes District or General Council affiliated, there should be no provision made for a governmental move to another fellowship.**
    Strongly agree Agree No opinion/not sure Disagree Strongly disagree
13. **I have felt free to preach concerning any issue or position without fear of reprimand by district or national officials.**
    Strongly agree Agree No opinion/not sure Disagree Strongly disagree
14. **At times, I have been unable to express my beliefs as a result of local church politics.**
    Strongly agree Agree No opinion/not sure Disagree Strongly disagree
15. **At times, I have been uncomfortable expressing opinions that may be opposed by district or national positions.**
    Strongly agree Agree No opinion/not sure Disagree Strongly disagree
16. **I have confidence that present governmental structure used by my District leaders is helpful to my local ministry.**
    Strongly agree Agree No opinion/not sure Disagree Strongly disagree
17. **I have confidence that present governmental structure used by the National leaders is helpful to my local ministry.**
    Strongly agree Agree No opinion/not sure Disagree Strongly disagree

Theoretical Questions: *(circle one answer)*

18. **The Assemblies of God movement has stayed true to its original vision as articulated by our founders.**
    Strongly agree Agree No opinion/not sure Disagree Strongly disagree
19. **A possible restructuring of local, district, or national governmental structures within the Assemblies of God would be advisable.**
    Strongly agree Agree No opinion/not sure Disagree Strongly disagree

Comments: _____

_____

_____

Thank you again for assisting me in this project. Please return your survey in the postage paid envelope by December 15th. If you wish, you may fax the survey back at 803-798-0244. If you would like a copy of the final results, please complete the following section or include a business card:

Name_____**Address**_____

Email_____

APPENDIX 8

PERCEPTIONS OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT SURVEY RESULTS:
ALL PASTORS

LOCAL CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Table 1. In actual practice, the chief policy/decision maker is:

Size of Church	N 273	Pastor	Deacons Or Board of Trustees	Shared process by Pastor & Board	Other
0-200	230	42%	4%	52%	2%
201-499	84	25%	0	74%	1%
500-5000	39	49%	0	46%	5%

Table 2. In your opinion, church business is most successfully facilitated when:

Size of Church	N 273	Pastor is primary decision maker	Deacon/ Trustee Board is primary decision maker	Responsibility is shared between pastor and board	Other
0-200	230	31%	2%	66%	1%
201-499	84	20.2%	0	77.4%	2.4%
500-5000	39	33%	0	62%	5%

Table 3. In your opinion, the amount of lay-leader input in decision making should be:

Size of Church	N 273	None	Limited to advisory level	Equal to Pastor —consensus	Total -delegated to committees/ lay-teams	Other/ No An-swer
0-200	230	0	57%	37%	3%	3%
201-499	84	0	48%	50%	0	2%
500-5000	39	0	66.6%	18%	2.6%	12.8%

Table 4. As a pastor, deacon/trustee boards have been a very positive dynamic of my ministry.

Size of Church	N 273	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
0-200	230	75%	5%	19%	1%
201-499	84	74%	6%	20%	0
500-5000	39	84.6%	7.7%	7.7%	0

LOCAL CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Table 5. My ministry and the welfare of the church have been hindered more than helped by the existing board.

Size of Church	N 273	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
0-200	230	16%	7%	75%	2%
201-499	84	16%	2%	82%	0
500-5000	39	15%	5%	80%	0

Table 6. Church government in my Assembly is cumbersome.

Size of Church	N 273	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
0-200	230	12.61%	6.09%	79.56%	1.74%
201-499	84	12%	12%	76%	0
500-5000	39	23%	3%	74%	0

DISTRICT CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Table 7. I have found the District to be consistently supportive of pastoral leadership in terms of local church government.

Size of Church	N 273	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
0-200	230	72.2%	10.4%	17%	.4%
201-499	84	65%	17%	18%	0
500-5000	39	76.9%	2.6%	20.5%	0

Table 8. I have found the District Office to be a supportive resource in times of conflict within my congregation.

Size of Church	N 273	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
0-200	230	50%	33%	14%	3%
201-499	84	38%	31%	25%	6%
500-5000	39	54%	28%	13%	5%

Table 9. Hearing the talk of others, it has caused me concern that in certain situations, my District might inappropriately move to impede the sovereignty of my local congregation.

Size of Church	N 273	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
0-200	230	21.3%	18.3%	60%	.4%
201-499	84	21%	24%	55%	0
500-5000	39	28.2%	15.4%	56.4%	0

Table 10. At times, I have been unable to express my beliefs as a result of local church politics.

Size of Church	N 273	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
0-200	230	10.43%	5.22%	83.04	1.3%
201-499	84	12%	7%	80%	1%
500-5000	39	13%	10%	77%	0

DISTRICT CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Table 11. I have confidence that present governmental structure used by my District leaders is helpful to my local ministry.

Size of Church	N 273	Agree (%)	No Opinion/Not Sure(%)	Disagree (%)	Other/No Answer
0-200	230	62%	18%	19%	1%
201-499	84	56%	24%	20%	0
500-5000	39	48.7%	20.5%	30.8%	0

NATIONAL CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Table 12. I have confidence that present governmental structure used by the National leaders is helpful to my local ministry.

Size of Church	N 273	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
0-200	230	53.5%	27.4%	18.7%	.4%
201-499	84	33%	36%	30%	1%
500-5000	39	41%	18%	41%	0

Table 13. The Assemblies of God movement has stayed true to its original vision as articulated by our founders.

Size of Church	N 273	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
0-200	230	58%	14%	26%	2%
201-499	84	35%	33%	30%	2%
500-5000	39	51%	13%	36%	0

DISTRICT AND NATIONAL CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Table 14. I feel the District or National office should have property reversion right over each local Assembly.

Size of Church	N 273	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
0-200	230	36%	14%	49%	1%
201-499	84	29%	5%	65%	1%
500-5000	39	48.7%	7.7%	43.6%	0

Table 15. Sovereignty of local church government means that a local congregation should be able to disassociate itself from National or District affiliation under certain justifiable circumstances.

Size of Church	N 273	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
0-200	230	59.7%	8.7%	30%	1.7%
201-499	84	59.5%	10.7%	28.6%	1.2%
500-5000	39	67%	10%	23%	0

Table 16. Once an Assembly of God congregation becomes District or General Council affiliated, there should be no provision made for a governmental move to another fellowship.

Size of Church	N 273	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
0-200	230	44%	15%	40%	1%
201-499	84	36%	26%	38%	0
500-5000	39	23%	15%	59%	3%

Table 17. I have felt free to preach concerning any issue or position without fear of reprimand by District or National positions.

Size of Church	N 273	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
0-200	230	86%	6%	8%	0
201-499	84	85%	7%	8%	0
500-5000	39	77%	10%	13%	0

DISTRICT AND NATIONAL CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Table 18. At times, I have been uncomfortable expressing opinions that may be opposed by District or National positions.

Size of Church	N 273	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
0-200	230	21.7%	14.9%	62.6%	.8%
201-499	84	18%	16%	66%	0
500-5000	39	26%	8%	66%	0

LOCAL, DISTRICT AND NATIONAL CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Table 19. A possible restructuring of local, District or National governmental structure within the Assemblies of God would be advisable.

Size of Church	N 273	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
0-200	230	44%	30%	25%	1%
201-499	84	52%	36%	12%	0
500-5000	39	61.54%	20.51%	17.95%	0

APPENDIX 9

PERCEPTIONS OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT SURVEY RESULTS:
SOUTH CAROLINA PASTORS

LOCAL CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Table 1. In actual practice, the chief policy/decision maker is:

South Carolina Pastor N	Pastor	Deacons or Board of Trustees	Shared process by Pastor & Board	Other
41	34%	15%	49%	2%

Table 2. In your opinion, church business is most successfully facilitated when:

South Carolina Pastor N	Pastor is primary decision maker	Deacon/ Trustee Board is primary decision maker	Responsibility is shared between pastor and board	Other
41	39.02%	2.44%	56.1%	2.44%

Table 3. In your opinion, the amount of lay-leader input in decision making should be:

South Carolina Pastor N	None	Limited to advisory level	Equal to Pastor —consensus	Total -delegated to committees/ lay-teams	Other/No Answer
41	0	61%	32%	2%	5%

Table 4. As a pastor, deacon/trustee boards have been a very positive dynamic of my ministry.

South Carolina Pastors N	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
41	59%	2%	39%	0

Table 5. My ministry and the welfare of the church have been hindered more than helped by the existing board.

South Carolina Pastors N	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
41	24%	12%	59%	2%

Table 6. Church government in my Assembly is cumbersome.

South Carolina Pastors N	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
41	24.4%	2.43%	70.74%	2.43%

DISTRICT CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Table 7. I have found the District to be consistently supportive of pastoral leadership in terms of local church government.

South Carolina Pastors N	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
41	49%	22%	29%	0

Table 8. I have found the District Office to be a supportive resource in times of conflict within my congregation.

South Carolina Pastors N	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
41	32%	34%	32%	2%

Table 9. Hearing the talk of others, it has caused me concern that in certain situations, my District might inappropriately move to impede the sovereignty of my local congregation.

South Carolina Pastors N	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
41	46%	22%	32%	0

Table 10. At times, I have been unable to express my beliefs as a result of local church politics.

South Carolina Pastors N	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
41	20%	2%	76%	2%

Table 11. I have confidence that present governmental structure used by my District leaders is helpful to my local ministry.

South Carolina Pastors N	Agree (%)	No Opinion/Not Sure (%)	Disagree (%)	Other/ No Answer
41	34%	22%	37%	7%

NATIONAL CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Table 12. I have confidence that present governmental structure used by the National leaders is helpful to my local ministry.

South Carolina Pastors N	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
41	36%	32%	32%	0

Table 13. The Assemblies of God movement has stayed true to its original vision as articulated by our founders.

South Carolina Pastors N	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
41	41%	10%	49%	0

DISTRICT AND NATIONAL CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Table 14. I feel the District or National office should have property reversion right over each local Assembly.

South Carolina Pastors N	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
41	24.4%	7.3%	68.3%	0

Table 15. Sovereignty of local church government means that a local congregation should be able to disassociate itself from National or District affiliation under certain justifiable circumstances.

South Carolina Pastors N	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
41	76%	10%	12%	2%

Table 16. Once an Assembly of God congregation becomes District or General Council affiliated, there should be no provision made for a governmental move to another fellowship.

South Carolina Pastors N	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
41	19.5%	14.6%	65.9%	0

Table 17. I have felt free to preach concerning any issue or position without fear of reprimand by District or National positions.

South Carolina Pastors N	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
41	78%	7%	15%	0

Table 18. At times, I have been uncomfortable expressing opinions that may be opposed by District or National positions.

South Carolina Pastors N	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
41	20%	2%	76%	2%

LOCAL, DISTRICT AND NATIONAL CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Table 19. A possible restructuring of local, District or National governmental structure within the Assemblies of God would be advisable.

South Carolina Pastors N	Agree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Disagree	Other/ No Answer
41	66%	22%	12%	0

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Additional Seminary Studies at: New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

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Licensure

1974 Licensed by the General Council of the Assemblies of God

1978 Ordained by the General Council of the Assemblies of God

Ministerial Experience

1976–1977; 1979–1981 Youth and Children's Pastor

1981–2006 Senior Pastor

Assemblies of God District Positions

Alabama District Assistant Youth Director 1982–1988

Alabama District Chi Alpha Coordinator 1986–1987

Alabama District Facilities Relocation Committee 1985–1988

South Carolina District Presbyter 1996–1998

South Carolina District Assistant Presbyter 2002–2006

South Carolina District Transformation Team 2004–2006